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MISTRESS BARBARA

Mistress Barbara

CHAPTER I

THE ROAD TO WYECOLLAR

THE road from Ling Crag village out to Colne, a sad and lonely road at most times, showed fairer than its wont this February afternoon. For the winter had been short, as moor-winters go, and there was delicate promise of spring already in the slow-changing tints of ling and lean marsh grasses and rusty last-year's bracken. February Fill-dyke they called the month, but its name was little merited this year; for the last fortnight had been dry and crisp, and the sun had regained a little strength, and the throstles, farther down among the valleys, had found good heart again. Solitary as the land was, and remote from such tenderer glimpses of the spring as the sheltered gardens show, there was the throb of waking life beneath its harshness, the stir and lusty fret of Nature's motherhood. No snow-drops blew, maiden supplicants at wild winter's feet; no celandines, to promise richer glory of the teeming May; but the bilberry spikes were knobbed with green, and some of them were crimson all down their bare hard stems—the crowberry leaves were brighter

green—the larks, which are the moor's own minstrels, were bethinking them of songs forgotten through the long months of snow. A starveling ewe sat under a scarce-budding thorn, and bleated fitfully. And the sky was a fleece of God's own weaving, with the many-coloured weft of purple, crimson, and green-blue, spun light into the grey, fair-weather woof of cloud.

Yet it was lonely here, and the road, pointing like a gnarled finger at the farther reaches of the heath, seemed only to deepen and interpret their stark, self-centred barrenness. Snow, too, was laid like lawn up every wrinkle, every dene and rugged cleft, and here and there a three-foot drift still lingered at the roadside, keeping the surface wet and greasy for a horse's hoofs. Now and then a plover wheeled, crying from the higher land, drowning the lark's song as it passed. A winter that was slow to go, and a spring that was chary of its incoming—no day could have shown to better purpose the temper of the moor, no day could have matched more truly the temper of the horseman riding slowly west toward Lancashire.

Straight in the saddle he sat, his head held fairly up to meet the world; his face held room, one would have said, for kindliness and faith in fellowship, and mellow humour,—which are the spring-winds of man's wintry life,—but his mood seemed far from any softer feeling. From the cleft beneath his thick straight brows to the line of his hard-set mouth he carried the marks of one who looked for hardness in the world and was prepared to meet it with no less; and by and by, when the larks' bravery was drowned afresh by the over-wheeling

peewits, he nodded up as if in greeting to them. He liked these lonely, never-resting birds, whose cry is Ishmael's cry, whose heart is Ishmael's heart; for he, like they, was following a friendless road, and the wry aloofness of a life apart was growing like a wall between himself and all who chanced across his path. He rode more slowly still as he came by Sorrowful Water, and marked how strange a mirror it held up to the uncouth face of the land. A light breeze roughened the outer rim of water, but in the middle it was still and smooth, with bearded rise, and snowy cleft, and dappled, pearl-strung sky reflected to a wonderland of softer tones. On this side its edge was level with the road; beyond it lay in rounded bays and inlets, lipping the great rise of moor that gave it shelter.

"Ay, so—and up yonder is Dead Lad's Rigg—and down below is bonnie Wyecollar. Lord, how I loved it as a lad!" the horseman muttered, and plucked his rein impatiently.

He did not halt again until the Herders Inn was reached—a low, silent tavern, which seemed rather a bit of the harsh land about it than a house of cheer for travellers upon the road. A mistal stood at the one end, and the fields behind looked scarcely leaner than the heath itself. On the roadway in front, a cart was drawn up, laden with bales of uncombed wool, and the team was fogged with sweat. The horseman tied his bridle to the ring that hung on a rusty chain beside the door, stopped for a moment to handle a fleece that was showing through a rent in its sack, laughed at the instinct with a shade of bitterness, and went indoors.

He had turned wool into gold these fifteen years past, but even yet he did not like the trade, nor felt one touch of pride in it.

"Hi, Lavrock!" he called, striding into the bar with the air of a man who comes on business and measures time in a nice balance.

There was a crunch of footsteps along the sanded passage, a surly "Lig thee dahn, tha fooil," following a dog's twice-repeated growl, and then a rough-headed fellow pushed his way into the bar.

"Morning to ye, Maister Royd. Ye're ahead o' th' clock, I'm thinking," he said, half touching his slouch hat.

"We have to be these times, if we mean to win bread and butter for the next day's meal. Where are those sheep of yours, Lavrock?"

The other pulled his pipe out and leaned against the mantel while he lit it. "Lord save us, your father war niver known to be i' a hurry save he war riding to hounds," he growled. "What ails ye, Maister Royd? Willun't th' sheep bide while I bring ye a sup o' rum?"

"The rum must wait. There's money in my pockets here, Lavrock, and you sent for me to drive a bargain."

A teamster was sitting in one corner of the bar with a plate of bread and cheese before him. Lavrock glanced at him, and then at Royd. "Well, if ye're so minded, ye can see th' sheep this varry minute," he said, moving out into the passage.

They went along the road in silence, and in at the gateway on their left. "I wodn't hev yonder carter chap know what I'd come to," said Lavrock, with a jerk

of the head towards the tavern. "Pride's pride, an' I've my place to keep wi' customers, an' they'll be saying th' Herders is going downhill if they know why ye rade fro' Ling Crag Miln this morn."

"You want money down?" said Royd, cold as he always was when a bargain had to be driven. "It's ill work, they say, buying wool before it's grown."

"Ye'll tak your price for th' risk," answered the other grimly. "Ay, ye'll tak your price, for even on th' Lancashire side they say Stephen Royd is hard to traffic wi'. Well, here are th' sheep: I've getten 'em penned all ready for ye."

Royd counted them, handled their wool—the long wool on their backs, and the short that grew on the underside of the neck—all with the same impassive silence. The tavern-keeper leaned against the pinfold wall and chewed a straw, and watched the business through.

"Ye tak to't like a duck to water," he said. "'Tis plain to be seen ye've getten summat i' ye, Maister Royd, that your father niver taught ye."

The other winced a little, but made no answer, only went on counting up the tale of wool that was to be told at the next shearing-time.

"An' to think I handled ye when ye war a babby—an' taught ye how to snare a grouse when ye war a little lad," began the old man.

Royd turned from the pinfold, and looked steadily into the other's face. "Ay, and I bear old days in mind," he said—"after a bargain's driven. I'll give you twenty guineas for this year's wool, Lavrock."

He could see by Lavrock's air, by the very way he shifted his feet about instead of planting them wide apart, firmly and obstinately, that he was no hand at a bargain; and he named a price that was less by ten guineas than a surer front would have secured.

Lavrock shortened the wet end of his straw, restored it to its place, and glanced wistfully at his lean flock.

"Mak' it five-an'-twenty," he said, with little assurance in his voice.

Royd buttoned up his pocket, which he had already opened temptingly. "I never go back on my price. Take it or leave it," he said.

"We'll call it two-an'-twenty, an' th' bargain's still on your side."

"Your wool is worth twenty guineas to me, and not a shilling more," said the other, half turning on his heel. "Well, Lavrock?"

"Show us th' brass, then, an' let's get to our drinking. Ye can count it on this gate-stun here."

Royd took out his leathern bag, untied the well-worn bit of string that fastened it, and laid down the sovereigns one by one upon the stone. Then, the business over, his manner changed upon the sudden, as he crossed the untidy yard and glanced down the close-cropped fields. He knew the scene by heart: the wild line of Dead Lad's Rigg, brown, steep and ragged; Wyecollar Dene, lying snug within the deep fold of the hills, and sheltered from every wind that blew except the west; far to the right, old Pendle Hill, that pushed its round head into cloudland and slept a giant's sleep, secure in its brute majesty; beyond, the snow-seamed lesser

ridges, with their long backs raking from saffron east to ruddy, purpling west. By heart he knew it all, he had learned his poaching here, had learned the ways of snipe and moor-cock, trout and hare and fox; the way the bees swarmed in summer-time, and how to take them in the hive; had felt the eerie glamour of the Dene below, whose every wrinkle, every bush and warren, was known to him. And the old Hall there, with its roystering, luckless line of Cunliffes—had he not felt his boy's heart fail him, as he wandered in and out among the ruins, and hearkened for the Ghostly Huntsman, and heard the legendary folk come back to life again and rustle up and down the oaken stairs?

His face was softened when at last he turned about. "It's long since I saw the Dene yonder—how long, think ye, Lavrock?" he said.

"Mony a year, I reckon; more's the pity. An' more's the pity, say I, that ye've ta'en to trade, though ye do frame weel at th' job. Why, Maister Royd, 'tis six miles an' better fro' here to th' Heights, yet I mind when your father could ride all th' way fro' there to here, an' scarce be out o' sight of one farm or another that he owned. Ay, he war all for land, he war—"

"And lost it through keeping open house and open wine-taps," put in Royd; "and left me at sixteen to find a living for myself. See, Lavrock, I'd rather let old troubles lie."

"It's weel when troubles will lie," struck in the other, moving shiftlessly to Royd's side and looking down upon the Dene. "They war always up an' busy, war troubles, when th' Cunliffes dwelled down yonder. An',

by that token, th' owd Squire war hunting last neet, for I heard him."

"What? Squire Emmott down at Lanshaw Brigg?"

"Squire Cunliffe o' Wyecollar. Who else goes hunting hereabouts by neet?"

"He's old for hunting, Lavrock," laughed Royd, glancing at the other's sober, weather-wrinkled face.

"Middling. He died a matter o' two hundred year ago, I'm telled: but he's spry at the job still, is th' Squire o' Wyecollar."

Royd turned toward the inn. "You're a fool," he said impatiently. "Leave boggarts to the old wives, Lavrock."

"Axing your pardon, sir, 'tis a matter o' where ye bide, I fancy," said Lavrock, showing a firm front at last. "Ye live wi' wool nowadays, an' there's folk about ye neet an' day: but here it's different-like. Look ye!" he broke off, pointing up the deep-lipped dingle, "I've lived nigh th' Dene yonder, man an' boy, these three-score year, an' I found it quiet—fearful quiet. Ye'll hear a peewit now an' again; an' if ye listen, on a windless day, ligging ear to ground, ye'll hear th' sheep nibbling th' grass; but varry little else ye'll hear. Well, it teaches a man summat—summat he'll niver learn fro' wool, save an' except he lives where th' wool grows."

"That may be," said Royd slowly; "I call to mind how once you taught me, Lavrock, to shiver at the Huntsman. So he was abroad last night?"

"Ay, was he. The wind gat up fro' the north-west, it mud be four o' th' clock, an' wakened me wi' its

Royd laughed, with the memory of other days still strong upon him. "Treat him well, Lavrock, and keep suspicion off, for old sake's sake; for Tim and I were thick together as lads, and you taught both of us the way of night excursions."

All roads of talk, it seemed, lay towards Squire Cunliffe this afternoon; and this out-of-elbows rogue, nursing a broken arm at a wayside inn, led Lavrock to return to the topic Royd most wished to escape.

"Did ye iver fathom," asked the innkeeper, stooping to pick a fresh straw from the road, "what link there is 'twixt Tim an' owd Squire Cunliffe?"

"What link should there be? You've a long tongue for such a littlish body, Lavrock."

"Well, I can but hearken when folks talk; an' there's hardly one comes up here fro' Ling Crag but hes his word to say. Some think Squire's wise enough to know his own child, for he was wildish as a young un they say; some reckon Tim helps him wi' his black magic, an' his turning stones to gold, an' what all; but Tim keeps his mouth as close as a rat-trap wheniver I so mich as mention Squire's name."

"May the Lord send all of us quiet tongues," said Royd gruffly. "When will that wool be ready for delivery, Lavrock?"

"Nay, that's as th' wind shapes," growled Lavrock, who, like all weakish men who strive to pluck a living from the highlands, was prone to shift all responsibility upon the weather. "If this promise o' spring holds gooid, we may shear say i' th' back-end o' May. But there's niver no telling."

"At any rate, the winter seems fairly over for this year. You'll have a fine lambing season, Lavrock, take my word for it."

"Young blood, young blood! Ye put me i' mind o' Parson, that ye do. Parson war up here yestreen, an' he axed me how things war going. Noan so weel, says I: an' then Parson says, 'Don't be downcast, Lavrock,' says he, 'God tempers the wind to the shorn lamb.' 'Parson,' says I, looking slantways at him, 'did ye iver go in for sheep-rearing?' 'Nay,' says he. 'I thowt not,' says I. Sakes, Maister Royd, it fair ruffles me, whiles, to hear folk talking o' what they doan't understand. Shear i' June, an' ye'll happen get tempered winds—happen, mind ye: I wodn't be sure, not I, for I've seen snow i' June myseln."

Royd stopped with his hand on the bridle. "Lavrock," he said suddenly, "what's amiss with you these days? The farm and the inn between them paid nicely once."

"An' now nawther on them pay. What's amiss? Nay, I've come in for a slice o' Cunliffe lucklessness, I fancy, through living so nigh their ghosts. One thing's followed another; ten ewes war lost i' the last snow-storm; th' beasts hev had th' Evil Eye on 'em, an' willun't eat nor thrive; trade's less on th' road, an' they do say folk stop i' Lanshaw Brigg nowadays to drink i'stead o' coming here. I'm i' a bad way, Maister Royd, an' I'm shamed to say as mich to one I dandled on my knee."

The other was still playing with his bridle. "Will times mend, think ye?" he said gruffly.

"I reckon they might; ay, even to us owd uns, as ought to know better, there's hope comes wi' th' summer-time. But rent-day's a sight surer nor summer, an' that's gospel; an' I doubt I'll niver weather th' next rent-taking."

Royd got to the saddle, as if impatient to be off. "Come to me at Ling Crag to-morrow; I'll lend you fifty guineas—give them, if you don't find your feet again."

"But you wodn't gi'e me a shilling more for th' wool, an' it war worth it," cried Lavrock, staring blankly at him.

"Not I," snapped Royd, "when I'm buying, what do I care if you're starving in the ditch? It's not you I'm thinking of; it's the stuff you have to sell. A loan for old time's sake is the boot on another leg."

He had touched his horse with the whip, and had started before the host could say another word, or stammer out an invitation to a stirrup-cup.

"Begow, there's nowt so queer as folk!" muttered Lavrock. "An' him so keen, an' all, to beat me dahn i' price. But I wodn't hev whined about bad times to th' lad if I'd knawn how he meant to tak it. Well, well, breed tells, I reckon, an' if trade keeps his one pocket buttoned tight, breed oppens t'other. Now, where's yond dog o' Tim's? I'd best keep it close to th' house, as Maister Royd says, for seeing th' dog is as gooid as seeing its maister ony day."

But the terrier was nowhere to be found; and Lavrock, straining his eyes along the road, saw that it was trotting close behind Royd's horse.

"Well, now, I'm capped!" cried Lavrock. "Th' little bitch mun think she's lost her maister, like, an' that Maister Royd knows wheer to find him. Eh, but they're rum uns, is dogs—nigh as rum as humans, though it's saying a deal."

Royd, meanwhile, rode back along the sand-grey stretch of highway—rode slowly, and let the spirit of the hour sit by him on the saddle. The glory of the failing day was over heath and sky and water, and the silence of the hilltops shut out all whispers of a world beyond. He was a landless man who remembered well what love of land for land's sake was; he was riding over acres that ought to be his own; but the larger issues held him for this little hour, and the hills were more than the lands they sheltered, the barren ling was worthier than pride.

"Five years since last I saw it all!" he muttered. "Five years, and little Barbara not grown to an age to vex me then. I taught her how to sit a saddle—she tumbled once, down at the hillfoot yonder, and laughed when I looked for tears—Lord knows why he robs us of our playmates and makes them women for the old Adam's sake."

He had passed the quivering marge of Sorrowful Water by this, and far ahead he marked the blank line of Ling Crag village, the farther round of Marshcotes moor, with the two upstanding wheels that showed where coal lay under its twin-fuel, peat. The terrier meanwhile kept discreetly in the rear, just out of reach of the hoofs, as if it wished to keep its presence secret

until Ling Crag was reached. So deep Royd's thoughts were, and his eyes so lost among the distances, that he did not hear the sound of hoofs until three riders met him at the sharp turning of the way. One was Squire Cunliffe, another Bancroft, who held his patrimony; and on the other side her father rode little Barbara, his playmate, grown to dignity.

"What, Stephen? We thought ourselves late riders, but we have company, it seems," cried the Squire, answering Royd's bow with the courtliness of an earlier and more elaborate day.

There was obstinacy in Royd, deep as his pride. His seclusion from the world of late had been deliberate, and yet it irked him to find how blunt he was, and how the courtesy had rusted in him for want of contact with his kind. It irked him, too, that at heart he felt no prouder of his trade than those he talked with; his instincts were the Squire's, sprung from tough rootage in the soil; his goal even now was land—alway's land—and he was reaching it by a road that was little to his liking. And so he drew apart a little, as a stranger might, and met the old Squire's stately warmth with coldness.

"We have to ride far sometimes," he said, "when we go in search of wool. I have just bought for twenty guineas, sir, what was worth at least ten more."

The Squire was of the rare race of gentlemen who refrained, not from rude speech only, but, when he could, from the inward treachery of thought that needs to hide its nakedness by speech. Yet now he could not

keep a frown back, and his face lost a little of its welcome; for he had loved this lad, and he had striven again and again to lead him into other paths.

Barbara looked as if she would break the pause that followed; but it was Bancroft of the Heights who spoke.

"Damme, will you come barter for my wool one day?" he laughed, with a sneer behind his question. "My bailiff sees to that—and I warrant you will find him no milksop at a bargain. Will you buy, Mr. Royd?"

"If it be worth the buying," answered Royd quietly.

Little Barbara was fidgeting with her reins: and the pity, touched with shame, with which she glanced at Royd seemed more than ever to make her worth a strong man's winning.

"The gloaming deepens, father; had we not better turn?" she said.

"Why, yes, little one," laughed the Squire, who was the tenderest fool in Christendom where Barbara was concerned. "The boggarts might come and snatch you else—for they say they love a bonnie maid. Come, Stephen, your way is ours, at least as far as Scartop—farther if you'll come and sup with us."

"My thanks, sir, but I must be home by seven. I fear it is business, business with me always."

Again the Squire frowned. "We see you over seldom nowadays at Wynyates; I am sorry," was all he said.

"Gad, Mr. Royd, why do it?" broke in Bancroft, as

he turned his horse about with no good grace. "What the deuce is there in wool to lead a man into a hermitage? As for me, I know less than nothing of the stuff, except that it grows on the backs of silly sheep."

"Then Heaven pity you, Mr. Bancroft, for you have much to learn that even I could teach you;" Barbara's voice was smooth and delicate, but under it there was an anger she would not show.

"But will you teach me?" he took her up. "I would grow as fond of it as Mr. Royd with such tuition."

Barbara looked across him, neglecting to resent such plough-boy gallantry. "Is trade good, Mr. Royd?" she asked. "Oh, but I hope it is! For father, though he does not like to see a mill, is bound to like selling at a good price. Farming would fail up here if it were not for sheep, they always say; and so our livelihood depends on Mr. Royd, and such as he; does it not, father?"

The Squire glanced quickly at her, and the kindly hollows of his face were changed to careworn wrinkles. He looked ten years more world-weary than he had done a moment since. "Our livelihood," he echoed harshly; "why, child, there is more than wool to live on, let us hope, though I never sold another fleece."

Royd's mind went back to the uncertain whispers that were rife touching the Squire's pursuit of magic and the Philosopher's Stone; but he dismissed the folly, and told himself that Barbara's father was troubled only by her speaking of the debt which all the farming-gentry owed to trade. They were at the hillfoot now,

where the bridle-track to Wynyates left the main highway and crossed the stream that rippled brown from Conie Crag Ravine.

"So you will not join us, Stephen?" said the Squire, half drawing rein.

"It would be kind of you, Mr. Royd," murmured Barbara.

Bancroft of the Heights had never been at home with moorland character; its reticence he could not credit, because of the outspoken, simple honesty that hid its proud exclusiveness. And so he let few opportunities go by of blundering, and thought his own outspokenness was of the same calibre as theirs.

"Don't waste entreaties, Miss Barbara," he cried. "That glance of yours was thrown away—see, he is looking down the valley now and thinking that his wool-bags are fairer than your hospitality."

Royd bit his lip, and kept back his anger with an effort that trade alone had taught him. "You are an indifferent reader of the thoughts, Mr. Bancroft," he said, as if he were snubbing an unruly child. "I think perhaps you have not lived long enough among us yet. You are more than kind, sir, to press me," he broke off, turning to the Squire. "May I ride up after supper, for the business that is waiting for me will not keep?"

"Better a late guest than none at all—and, as you love us, cut short your business, Stephen. Mr. Bancroft, do you come with us?"

There was no seconding of the invitation now from

Barbara, although she was wont to be punctilious in such matters.

"And gladly, though I must run away soon afterwards, I fear," said Bancroft noisily. "My bailiff comes to see me every other Thursday evening—and I tell him every other Thursday evening that I wish he and his tales of crops and herds were sunk under Lostwithens Marsh. Faith, I know not whether I hate trade or farming more."

"Your wish may be granted one day," said Royd, still with the same cool disregard of the other's clumsy rudeness. "Suppose the Marsh breaks down the valley again as it did long ago? What a relief it would be for one who hates his lands so—to see sheep and cows and good green crops go altogether down the stream."

"The Heights stand overhigh for that; but your wish is charitable, for all that, Mr. Royd—so charitable I must acquit you of any envy in the matter."

The Squire looked blankly from Royd's quiet, impenetrable face to the other's scarce-veiled sullenness. "Gentlemen, gentlemen!" he cried with the self-excusing gentleness which never yet had failed to end dispute. "Young men talk very foolishly and very thoughtlessly. It was a habit of my own, I fancy, once on a day—but I have grown beyond it."

"You are the gainer, sir," said Royd, and lifted his beaver, and was turning down the highway when he caught sight of an unwashen, guilty looking terrier, which had come from underneath his own horse and was jumping up to claim attention from the Squire.

It was not the dog's unexpected following of him that made Royd stop in wonderment, but the old Squire's agitation as he tossed a greeting to the dog.

"Why, that is Tim the Rogue's dog. Why has she followed me, I wonder?" cried Royd.

"It—it is strange," murmured the Squire. "The poor beast seems ill-at-ease, as if—as if she wanted us to find her master."

"I'll take her home with me," laughed Royd; "she knows that Tim o' Tabs is never long between visits, and to-morrow is his day for bringing combings to the mill."

"Yes, to-morrow is his day. To be sure to-morrow is his day," said the Squire absently, as he wheeled into the bridle-track. "I trust that no mischance has come to him."

But the terrier did not follow Royd, in spite of all his whistles; she stuck close as a thistle-burr to Squire Cunliffe's horse, and when the three of them dismounted in the Wynyates courtyard, she followed him indoors and hugged his shadow all the evening through.

CHAPTER II

THE GREY HOUSE ON THE HILL

ROYD thought a little bitterly of Barbara, as he rode up to Wynyates House at nine of the same evening; and, though it was only in his own mind that old companionship had ceased between them, the sense of loss was no less strong on him. Sane in business, sane in the self-restraint which pressed ambition, passion, all desire of ease into the one labour of his life, there was yet a morbid underside to the character he had fashioned for himself—fashioned from the tangle of rough-riding, hard-drinking, spendthrift instincts which his fathers had bequeathed him. He lacked the power to bend to the little in-and-outs of circumstances; he was a shade over-serious to cope with the niceties of social intercourse; and, knowing this, he magnified the fault, and hid under a mask of unresponsiveness what his neighbours could not know for diffidence. Pride, too, had warped his character; he was cruelly sensitive to the view which those of his own class held of trade, and resented criticism in the same breath that he told himself he cared for no man's good or bad opinion.

So, too, with Barbara. Till lately she had been a child, merry and frank and understandable; but soon

as she put off the child and met him with the instinctive self-withdrawal of the woman who is unused as yet to womanhood, he found disastrous changes in her—found them because he looked for them, and brought a gravé and wilful perversity to help him in the search. When she reproved him slily for the faults which she was loth to see growing so quickly in him, or when, ruffled by long coldness on his part, she let her dainty wit flash out a moment at him—only to heal the wound of her own giving with repentant haste—Royd thought that it was his work, and not himself, which she reproved. It was natural, he said, that one so delicate as Barbara should shrink from a trade that kept a man on the one hand counting guineas, on the other testing the feel of greasy wool. And yet, though he would not confess it in as many words, he knew that half his zest for this same work, half his grim, unsmiling love of toil, would vanish if he lost all touch of little Barbara.

He remembered Bancroft of the Heights, and the gossip that had linked his name with Barbara's. Bancroft was spruce and debonair—ten years his junior, with leisure for studying such trifling arts as pleased all women-folk. Would the child have wit to see what was plain to Parson Horrocks, plain to himself,—plain even to the Squire,—that this gay ruffler, groomed to a miracle, was of a very raw gentility as yet?

Royd let a sigh escape him. He had never thought of himself as Barbara's suitor,—her childhood was too near for that,—but he realised to-night, with sharp and sudden bitterness, that their old friendship could not long go undisturbed. He flicked his horse impatiently,

and the chestnut, roused from his own musings, sprang forward, all but unseating his master and carrying him at a gallop through Ling Crag village. Another horseman passed them at the end of the village, riding in the opposite direction, and Royd was glad to see that it was Bancroft of the Heights—glad, for he had no wish to find him still at Wynyates when he arrived.

"You ride for your life, I fancy, Mr. Royd—or is it for no more serious thing than love?" cried Bancroft as he passed.

"For neither, Mr. Bancroft," snapped the other, and rode on at the same pace—along the level, and down the slack, and half up the steep curve of the road that led to Wynyates.

His horse went slower then perforce, and Royd fell into his former train of thought. If only Barbara had lacked something of her beauty! Friendship between them would have been easier then. But, as it was, what clod was there, from Ling Crag out to Lanshaw Brigg, but did not warm at the mention of her name? It had been the same with her mother, and Royd remembered still what a stir had gone abroad when Squire Cunliffe, over twenty years ago, brought home his bride; such daintiness of face and figure was new to the experience of the moor-folk, and they had scarce done wondering at it when Barbara had grown to a second and a fairer marvel in their midst. And now, with half the parish over ears in love with Barbara's comeliness, and the other half as deep in love with her soft, unstudied charm, what chance had Stephen Royd, who at six-and-thirty was already hardening in his shell?

He was near the last bend of the roadway now. The night was full of stars, with a young moon creeping through the moor-mists; and the house of Wynyates showed a hospitable gable to him from above. The Grey House on the Hill they called it in Ling Crag; yet it was only midway up the slope, and, while it met the gentler winds and welcomed them, its trees and the topmost edge of moorland gave it shelter from the worst of every storm. Something in the night, something in his own unguarded weariness of mood, set softer pulses beating in the wayfarer. He would come more often to this Grey House on the Hill, he told himself; for there was lang-syne kindness there, and peace, and courtesy as old-fashioned as the flowers that grew in its well-tended garden. A man never set foot within the ever open door of Wynyates House but he was glad of it; and never left without a sense of the world's worthiness, which warmed him like a stirrup-cup upon the road. Why had he shunned it so of late? Royd asked himself a dozen times.

A round deep laugh sounded from behind, and, turning, he saw a portly figure astride a mare no less well-padded round the ribs.

"All roads lead to Wynyates, it would seem. Do you ride to see the Squire, Stephen?"

"Good-even, Parson," cried Royd cheerily, as he waited for the other to come up. "It is not every day that one meets better company than one's own upon the road."

"That ever a lad of my own training should voice such barren sentiments! Why, Stephen, I'm younger

at five-and-sixty than you at—what is it?—something under forty. Pish, boy! All company is better than your own, if you could but know it. So you go to see the Squire?"

Royd nodded, laughing at the Parson's homily.

"Well, then, you're deceitful too as well as misanthropic. For you go to see his daughter, Stephen, and you know it. What's the saying? When the moon is young, Adam's folly is but green. See, the moon's peeping over the hill-shoulder at you, Stephen, now, and she has surprised a wondrous silly look upon your face."

"The light is treacherous, sir; I'd not rely on it if I were you."

"The passion is treacherous, boy; I'd not rely on it if I were you. By the breath of the spring that's coming, though, I could wish you nothing better. I sometimes fancy you're half-witted, Stephen, if you'll forgive an old man's flattery: show you a chance of making a shilling into two, and you let nothing stop you; but show you a bit of the purest gold that was ever minted into woman's shape, and— Here we are, and I'll let thee knock upon the gate, Stephen, for thy fist is growing hardish nowadays."

Royd took the Parson's raps as they were meant, in kindly part, and laughed them off. His knocking roused an uproar from within the house, a storm of sharp barks and petulant, unmannered growls.

"The Squire has got a new watch-dog since last I came here," cried Parson Horrocks. "I don't know that voice at all; it belongs to one of the smaller fry of dogland, I warrant—the little pots that are soon hot,

as honest Shakespeare has it. Where is old Grip, the mastiff, I wonder?"

"He will give tongue by and by. You would never guess, Parson, what a queer breed of dog is yapping at us—no less than that sharp-eyed little beast of Tim o' Tab's."

"What! Tim's double?"

"Yes, she followed me, Heaven knows why, from the Herders Inn to-day; and we met the Squire, and after that nothing would please her but she must go with him. Get down, lass, down! You've rough manners for a gentleman's house," he broke off, as the door was opened to them, and the terrier came leaping out to ask the password from them.

The Squire came down the passage, calling the dog back, and bowed to his guests with formal courtesy. He had his hands behind him, and soon as he had held out the right in greeting, he hid it out of sight again with a curious hurriedness—a trick of his that was as well-known to his friends as the fashion of the green brass-buttoned coat he wore. Behind him was Barbara, with a smile of welcome upon her face.

"Ah, Barbara, I give you fair good-even, to match your face," cried Parson Horrocks. "The old man has not to stoop so far as once he had, eh? See Stephen glaring at me there, because I'm old enough to kiss you. Boy—you're a fool; the saddest time in a man's life is when he finds he can kiss without offence."

"Fie, sir! to teach such gospel to your flock," laughed Barbara; "and, please, you must not lift me like a child, my dignity—"

"Then little Barbara must not be saucy. Your dignity? It is your frock you're thinking of, and I have crumpled it. Squire, how long is it since we were young? It is monstrous impudent of these young folk to prove to us how the years slip by."

"Stephen, what ails that dog?" broke in the Squire, not heeding the other's gaiety. He pointed to the terrier, which now was whining at the door, only to come back and press against the Squire's knees and look up into his face. "All evening she has wandered up and down like this, as if in search of something."

Royd glanced shrewdly at the Squire. "Tim o' Tab's is lying at the Herders with a broken arm," he said; "the poor beast has lost him somehow, it would seem, and thinks to find him here."

"Yes, it is his night to come here," said Barbara; "they say that dogs are quick as we are to learn a habit, and indeed it seems—"

She stopped as her eyes fell on the Squire, who stood beside the mantel locking and unlocking the hands that were clasped behind his back.

"A broken arm?" he echoed. "That is bad hearing, Stephen. Has the lad been poaching once again?"

"Something of the sort. I did not tell you when we met awhile back on the road, because Mr. Bancroft was there, and—"

He had no need to put the feeling into words. Bancroft of the Heights was not one of them; he did not share their view of poaching, and Tim's secret would have been in danger had he known it.

"He's an odd rogue," said Parson Horrocks, "this

Tim o' Tabs. Yet, when I christened him, more years ago than I care to remember, he looked as innocent as a lamb in spring. But then I named him Timothy—a grave, God-fearing name, mind you—and they ruined him by shortening it."

"Yet he works, time and time," put in Royd. "There' no man brings better combings to the mill than Tim. It has puzzled me to know how he finds time or patience for it."

The Squire was moving about the room, well-nigh as restlessly as the dog that followed him. "Barbara, we must send him a few comforts to-morrow," he said. "Perhaps—perhaps we might ride that way before the week is out."

"I'll join you, Squire," cried Parson Horrocks. "The rascal once got the soft side of my heart, and I've never since been able to thrust him out."

"We shall be glad. Yes, come with us by all means," said the Squire. But his assent was lukewarm, so it seemed to Royd, and his interest in Tim o' Tab's a trifle keener than simple kindliness demanded.

The Parson was a matchmaker in his own breezy way; and, as he took his snuff-box from the tail of his well-worn coat, he glanced at the two whom he was wont to call his children, and remembered his own young days.

"Squire," he said, applying a pinch to either nostril with leisurely enjoyment, "I'm too old a fogey to rest long of an evening without my pipe; I have brought a new tobacco, too, to tempt your palate. What say you?"

The Squire roused himself. "I grow forgetful Parson—I grow forgetful," he murmured. "Come Stephen, will you join us?"

"Not he!" cried Parson Horrocks. "D'ye think I'll have little Barbara left to nurse her loneliness? Stephen, shame on you to think so highly of tobacco; I never touched it at your age."

With that he bustled his host out into the passage. The terrier, not quick enough to follow the Squire, was left looking wistfully at the closed door, until Royd took pity on her.

"We have had all kinds of four-legged guests at Wynyates," laughed Barbara, as he crossed to the hearth again, "but never one so ragged as Tim's dog, I think. No, not that chair, please; it is so long since you were here, and I want to see you look at home, Stephen,—as—as you used to do."

He smiled at the quiet air of command with which she pointed to the roomy, padded chair at the far side of the hearth; it was so like the old days when she had been wont to say to him "do this," and see it done.

"Now, talk of yourself," she said, seating herself on a footstool opposite and looking up at him with grave enquiry. "You have not been nice of late, Stephen; or perhaps you have been too busy. If"—a vague defiance, as of pride, crept into her voice,—"if you had looked happy with it, I should not have asked you for the reason."

"Why, child, I'm well enough. A little too much work, and a little too much worry; that is all that ails me."

She shook her head. "Do you think I have known you all these years and cannot tell when things are all amiss with you? And when I was no higher than your knee, Stephen, you did not shut me out, as you are doing now, from all that vexed or pleased you. Do you remember when you lost everything almost and had to begin afresh? I was fourteen then, and—and I think you were not sorry to have told me of it."

Royd wondered how he had come to doubt her friendship. This was the Barbara he had known—unspoiled and frank, and ready to fear anything where those she cared for were in case.

"Barbara," he said, with a half-rueful laugh, "have I worn so grim a look of late that you thought that? Why, I am growing richer every day, and if the markets strengthen as they promise I shall do better still before the year is out."

"Oh, I am glad! I feared— Then what has been amiss?" she broke off, still regarding him with the same open, friendly glance.

He would have told her then, had he been any wiser than herself; as it was, he turned her question.

"I've seen too little of the Grey House on the Hill. See, Barbara, we'll dream old times are back, and you shall sing to me."

She rose at once and moved to the spinet; and when Royd would have come to turn the leaves, she would not let him.

"No, you shall put your hands behind your head—see how I remember all your lazy ways!—and I'll sing you the ballads that I know by heart."

First, she gave him "Barbara Allen," and then passed from one to another of the songs that were as familiar to both, and as full of old association as the sounds of the moors above them and the voice of the streams in the hollows. Royd sat and watched her, and felt the years fall off from him. The fragrant parlour, that he had known ever since he knew anything at all—the look, and feel, and scent of it were all as they had been long since. The oaken sideboard, with its load of china, its slender wineglasses and silver drinking-cups; the deep window-seat, half filled with hyacinths and crocuses; the curtains of white chintz, sprigged with pink flowers; the spinet just under the three-cornered cupboard; the mingled perfume of last year's rose-leaves, of living flowers, of old, well-polished oak. These—and Barbara, slim against the panelling behind her, with the candle-shadows lying soft across her face and the snowdrops nodding to her from the bowl that stood upon the spinet-top.

She stopped awhile, and looked across at him, and smiled as she drifted into the air of the ballad they knew best of all.

"I know a lady fair to see," she began, and when she halted at the end of the first verse, Royd nodded to her in token that he would have no less than all the song.

The old words, to a setting that she and Royd had given them long ago, seemed to linger in the shadowed corners of the room; and the quiet pathos of the song was echoed by the wind that rustled through the dead stalks of the garden flowers without.

It was done. Little Barbara sat mute, her fingers on the keys, and would not look at her friend of other days. And, like a flash, Royd saw another picture—saw his mill, with the wool-sacks, and the hum of spinning-frames, and the hard-faced folk who came to talk of pounds and pence. It was there, not here, that his work lay; and Barbara's voice had played strange tricks with him to-night.

He went to the spinet, and leaned his arm on it, and stood looking down at her; but still she would not turn to him, though never until now had she found cause to shun his glance. The silence grew at last so heavy that Barbara took down the snuffers from their tray and trimmed the candles without their needing it; she was growing womanly, it seemed, all in the space of one short evening.

"I was right, and you were wrong, child," he said, watching the slim fingers do their work; "it was common-sense, I think, that kept me away from Wynyates."

"I—I do not understand you, Stephen— See, the candles on the mantelshelf need snuffing too; will you not do them for me?"

He took the silver bauble from her, and again a thrill of strange disquiet stirred her at the chance contact of their hands. But he let the candle-wicks bend over as they listed, black and smoky, and held to what he had to say.

"I was born to this, little Barbara," he said, looking round the room; "a little more of it, and I should begin to feel it was my right, and then I should lose my grip

HE WENT TO THE SPINET AND STOOD LOOKING DOWN AT HER.

on facts. It's only some other man's shell, after all, that I have crept into, and I fear to leave it."

She did not answer; only played halting bars of "I know a lady fair to see," and felt more sorry than she understood that it was not she who was causing his disquiet, but just the hundred little symbols of luxury and ease of which she made but one poor item. And then before she had realised her pain, he was talking of old days again, and the warmth came back to her, and she forgot to keep her eyes away from his.

"You thought I had forgotten, then, child? You thought I was too careless to come back and play with my old comrade?" he finished.

"Your comrade has lacked playmates lately," faltered Barbara. "This Grey House on the Hill is sadly lonely, Stephen, when one stays to think of it."

His face grew quiet and grave again upon the sudden.

"I could not have made it brighter for you—not as things were," he said. "See, Barbara, some day—when I have done what I have set myself to do—I shall throw it all behind me, and come to the old life with clean hands, and—"

She turned on him, her face as wilful as his own, her eyes alight with something he had never yet seen there.

"How dare you talk of coming with clean hands!" she cried. "You are like them all; and I, who have followed you through failure and success—who have been proud and glad to see you working, Stephen—I find that *you* are ashamed, as father is ashamed, and Mr. Bancroft, and all of them—ashamed of the road that is carrying you to the hilltops."

Royd watched her, half admiring, half smiling at her zeal. He had been picturing the sharp contrast between his own way of life and Barbara's; he thought she was ennobling the mere details of his trade with a girl's untutored fancy, and all the while he did not guess that she was seeing deeper than himself—seeing the worthy core under the forbidding rind.

"I am fit to sing frail ballads to you," she went on, with heightened colour, "to work at the embroidery-frame that stands beside the window yonder, to shrink from everything that is not delicate and soft and perfumed. And this because I have grown from a child into a woman! Stephen, have we never known the moors together, you and I? Have you taught me nothing of wind and rain and thunder, and the bogs that drown a wayfarer and the great hills that lift him into life?"

"We have learned all that together, Babs," he said.

"Once we had walked to Wyecollar—do you remember?—and we came home across the moor. And the mist came rolling over Dead Lad's Rigg, and everything was blotted out, and we thought the night would come before we found our way again. Did I cry, Stephen? Did I sit on the heather with my hands clasped in my lap, and talk of dying an early death because I was over good for this hard world?"

Royd smiled, but not in pity of her inexperience now. "You did not cry, Babs; and when the mist lifted and we found ourselves four miles from home you would not let me carry you."

"No, for I should have been a hindrance, not a help."

"You were only ten, Barbara—and that was young for such deep reasoning."

There was a silence; and then, to his dismay, she bent her head above the yellow spinet-keys and broke into a storm of sobs. He would have put his arm about her as in childhood's days, but she shrank from him; and by and by she checked the sobs.

"I am not so very brave, am I, Stephen, after all?" she said, smiling up at him. "I—I think I shall go back to the embroidery and making of black currant wine; and then you'll not be troubled because I want you to be proud of—of such a shameful thing as trade."

Royd could not follow her. As well seek meaning from April on the moors, when rain and playful sunshine, soft winds and bitter chased one another up the wooden clefts. As his way was when ill-at-ease with her, he fell back on his old mastery.

"What is it, child? You're fey to-night, I think," he said, holding her two hands close. "That Huntsman ancestor of yours at Wyecollar was abroad last night, they say; has he passed by this way and whispered in your ear?"

She left the spinet and stood facing him; there was no mistaking the apprehension in her face. "Was he riding, Stephen? Who saw him?" she asked.

"Lavrock at the Herders vowed he heard him; Lavrock dreams too much for this life, as you know. Tut, Barbara, I would not have spoken of it—"

"One cannot kill the old faiths," she said simply; "if they are to die, Stephen, it will take more generations than you or I will see."

"Yes; but what had this mouldy Squire of Wyecollar to do with you?" he cried. "His branch of the Cunliffes died out many a year ago, and all their ill-luck with them."

"It is no use, Stephen, *we* have been called the luckless Cunliffes too, and they say that all we shall inherit by and by will be the family ruin."

Royd laughed, his old undaunted laugh that had been clearest always in the thick of his own troubles. "Were I the last to carry the name 'Luckless' I would fight till I killed old superstition and made the world say 'lucky Cunliffe.' The world is a parrot, Babs, and so is superstition."

She was weak now, and he was strong; she liked it better so. "You're still the same, Stephen," she said softly. "You never add 'God willing' when you say 'I will do this.' We Cunliffes always do—we fear what waits for us at the bending of the road."

He put his hands upon her shoulders and shook her playfully. "Now look at me, little playmate," he said. "Do you tell me—you, who did not cry when the mists rolled over Dead Lad's Rigg—that when the Huntsman has wandered through a farmer's nightmare you begin at once to look in every corner for disaster?"

"I do not look for it, it comes," she answered quietly, —"not big disaster, maybe, but trouble of some sort. Stephen, have you noticed any change in father lately?" she broke off.

He had noticed a growing coldness toward himself, but this he could not tell her; nor did she need be told how great the Squire's abhorrence was of anything that had to do with trade.

"He is ageing fast, I think," she went on. "Did you see how pale he went when you told him Tim o' Tab's was hurt? I have puzzled and puzzled to guess what the bond between them is, but cannot find an answer. Once before, when Tim was laid up for a month or two, he seemed to lose all heart; and never once went near the old loft above the mistal. Stephen, what does father do up there? He tells me everything but that; and I wake in the night and know that he is working, working among those dreary chemicals of his, and my heart aches for him."

"They say he is seeking the Philosopher's Stone; he is not the first who has followed a Jack-o'-lanthorn over barren land," Royd muttered, not knowing how to meet her question.

"It is killing him, Stephen. I can see the weariness grow greater week by week. Why will he not be content with the riches that we have?"

Royd understood—or thought he did—why she had given way so utterly a moment since. "Has this been weighing on you lately?" he asked. "I have never seen you cry, little Barbara, as you did just now—never with such a heart-break in it."

Her eyes dropped, and she hid her face, as if to cool its fire, among the snowdrops on the spinet-top. Even yet she did not know the reason of her tears; but she so far understood them as to stoop to unfamiliar deceit.

"Yes, it has—it has troubled me," she whispered. "Am I wrong to talk of it to you?"

"Why, bless me, that is Marshcotes clock we hear," came the Parson's jolly voice from the passage. "The wind must have shifted to the east, Squire, and that bodes good neither to man nor cattle. Well, little Barbara,"—opening the door a trifle clumsily,—"We heard your singing, and thought the throstles had mistaken what o'clock it was. Stephen, will you ride home by the way of Marshcotes? I have kept the Squire out of his bed until he's all but past it."

The Parson looked narrowly at Barbara as he stooped above her hand to bid farewell. He was quicker than his neighbours to read the speech that is never spoken, and what he learned from that quick glance kept him silent for the first mile of the journey home.

CHAPTER III

WAYFARERS ON THE ROAD OF TRADE

IT was Royd who first broke the silence, as he and Parson Horrocks climbed out of Scartop Hollow, and up the road that was taking them from the Grey House on the Hill to Marshcotes.

"I have met two old masters to-day, Parson," he said, waking from a dream of olden days. "Lavrock at the Herders, who taught me how to snare a grouse, and you—who taught me all else, I think," he added, in an altered voice. For only he knew how this grey old parson—who hid his good works carefully—had watched over, taught and fathered him.

Those few impulsive words meant much to Parson Horrocks; so much that his eyes grew dim a little—though that was owing, he told himself, to the shrewdness of the wind.

"Pish, boy! You should have come to me to learn grouse-snaring too," he cried, with would-be lightness. "What, not know the way of it? And how to net a hare? And how to make the farmers wonder why parsley grows so thick upon their fields? Let no man take a cure of souls in Marshcotes parish who does not know these things—for he'll preach to empty pews. And how is business, Stephen?"

"Good, with a likelihood of better, sir." He drew rein and pointed to a speck of light far up the hill-slope opposite. "That was a well-timed question, Parson. See the old homestead there," he said,—"the home that I have slaved and slaved to win back for the Royds. It grows fairer to me every year, I think."

The other sat his horse in silence, and watched the trembling of Royd's hands upon the reins, and the eagerness with which he leaned forward in the saddle—the fifty signs of inward fire that few were able to surprise in Stephen Royd; and the Parson nodded with grave appreciation, for he reckoned such signs healthy in young or old. And in truth the Heights looked like a house that no man could leave lightly, once having known it for his own. Long, low, and black, it showed to-night, with the wide valley, shadow-filled, creeping up and up as far as the dark patch of garden; yet it was less than altogether stern, for the moon lay on the tree-tops like a silvern reaping-hook, and the stars were kindly guardians.

"I was sixteen when I went out of yonder gates—a beggar hampered by his pride," Royd muttered. "That is twenty years since, Parson, and I could buy it now. Ay—but will Bancroft sell?"

"Bide your time, lad; I should not wonder."

"I was patient, while the price of it was in the making; but now I'm restless. Bancroft need never sell,—nor will he, knowing that to keep me out is the worst turn he can do me."

The Parson thrust his heels against his mare's plump sides.

"Stephen, the night is shrewd for those who've got no House of Dreams to keep them warm. Bancroft is going the way to lose land and money and all else,—bide quiet, I tell thee, lad, and the Heights will see a Royd again as master."

Another mile they rode in silence; then Parson Horrocks turned abruptly to the younger man.

"What were you saying awhile since to that child at Wynyates, Stephen?" he asked.

Royd's mind was clear of blame, however, and he only echoed the other's question in a tone that left no doubt of his honesty.

"Well, I never saw that look on her face before, and I had hoped—well—never mind what I had hoped, lad," the Parson finished with a sigh. "Why does the Squire go searching for this Magic Stone of his?" he went on presently, unconsciously repeating a question which the Squire's daughter had asked herself, not long since. "Does he not know that he showed himself a real alchemist at Barbara's birth? She is the sort of magic we want more of lad—we should see a world then all gold from sod to sky."

But Royd was silent, and the Parson, though he scanned his face, could find no key in it to what his thoughts of Barbara were. Nor could he guess that the wind, blowing cold and shrill from off the uplands, brought only to the younger man the soft notes of a ballad, sung to the music of a time-worn spinet. The solitary light upon the hill that marked the Heights was well behind them now, and down in the hollow of the valley a score of lighted windows mocked at the

moonlit loneliness which awhile since had seemed to wrap the slumbering land. The sight was one to bring Royd back from dreams of Barbara, for it told him that though his own mill was resting till the morrow, the spinning-frames of other masters were hurrying the night through in the feverish race for wealth.

"Look at Goit Mill yonder, Stephen," said the Parson, drawing rein as Royd had done not long ago. "'Tis godless work goes on down yonder, if all be true they whisper in the parish."

"It is all true, for I have seen it," answered the other slowly; "I have even fought with conscience now and then—though you would not guess it, Parson—to think that I make my money by aid of such as the master of Goit Mill."

"That is not common-sense, lad," put in the Parson kindly; "one good master leavens the lump of ten bad ones, and God be thanked for him, say I."

Royd's brow was drawn, and there was disquiet in his laugh, as if the talk had carried to some tender point. "I do not care to be called a good master—not even by you, Parson. I have my way to make, and I make it; philanthropy is a different trade."

The Parson only shook his head, for every man about the moorside thought Royd a better master than he believed himself to be. They stood there and watched the flickering, dull-red light of the oil-lamps in the windows down below, and the moving patches of shadow which told that little children were moving to and fro among the spinning-frames.

"The old order dies hard, lad Stephen, but its end is

nearing," said Parson Horrocks, as they made forward on their road again. "Yonder mill has stood there for a good ten years, and yet 'tis strange even now to me to see it there. Think of the contrast and the change. Ten years ago it was as silent in the valley here as up by grey old Wynyates; Wynyates is silent still—but here the lamps flare garishly, and the spindles never rest, and men make night into day for the bairns that have scarce grown to lisp their prayers."

"Prayers?" echoed Royd. "There are prayers needed down at Goit Mill, Parson—but I fancy you'll find all the bairns too tired to think of any."

"It is true, then, that they keep the children at their work till they've no strength left to take them home? True that the lash—"

"It is all true," Royd broke in brusquely,—"that and more; fancy could not paint Goit Mill in colours black enough."

"I have heard much of it, and have tried to think it false," said the Parson with a sigh. "Think of it, Stephen! We're so far away here from the trade centres, so far from all the hurry and feverishness of the towns. Look at the hills yonder; every line of them should preach peace and right-dealing to the man who builds his mill beneath their shadow."

Royd was silent for a moment; this old parson, with his faith and that poetry that had only grown the sweeter with old age, was a strange contrast, and a pathetic, to the man of the younger generation.

"The master of Goit Mill," he said at last, "does not look often at the hills, I fancy—except to see if rain

is coming when his dams are dry. Peace and right-dealing? He would tell you there's no money in them. Why, it is the loneliest of these upland mills that are the worst; they are out of reach, and things can be done there that would not be tolerated in the towns. Hold up, lass! Hold up!" he broke off, as his horse swerved suddenly and came to a dead halt. The moon was on the underside of Dead Lad's Rigg by now, and they had reached the darkest corner of the road.

"What is it, Stephen? are you thrown?" came the Parson's voice from out the darkness.

"No, but near it. This mare of mine must have seen something—but it is more than I can do."

The mare was trembling, and Royd, as he passed his hand along her neck, could feel the terror beaded there in drops of sweat. Not knowing what might be upon the road, he and the Parson went forward at a careful foot-pace until the highway drove clear of the over-hanging bank of trees, and gave them once again the dim starlight to which their eyes had grown accustomed. They saw now what had startled the mare, and Royd laughed softly at her for a fool; but Parson Horrocks kept his eyes upon the figure moving just ahead of them, and held his peace.

The figure of a child it was, with shoulders bent and head thrown forward; and though she made forward up the hill without a pause, her feet went stumbling from the right side to the left of the rough highway, and time and time she tottered drunkenly. The Parson called to her, but she did not stop nor answer, and when

he overtook her he saw that the lids lay heavy on her eyes.

"God's pity, Stephen, what is this?" he cried, as Royd came up with him. "The little lass is sound asleep, and but for your mare's fright we might well have over-ridden her. What is it, lad? Is she sleep-walking, think ye?"

"What is it?" repeated the other, who had seen such sights before; "it is over-much work and over-little food, Parson; for did we not see Goit Mill alight as we went by?"

"Is it time to waken, father?" she murmured.

"Will it be safe to wake her, eh? They say—"

"Ay, but her eyes are closed, not opened wide. She sleeps for weariness, sir, and she walks because she must needs get home to-night."

Parson Horrocks stooped and touched her on the shoulders, and a shiver seized her as if he had applied the lash.

Again the Parson touched her, and this time her eyes opened.

"Why, little lass, what art doing on the road at this hour of a dark night?" he cried.

The child stumbled, either from weariness or sleep, and her voice came drowsily, "Been to th' miln."

"And where do you live, bairn, eh?"

"I live wi' my mother, close by Marshcotes Kirk, sir." She was wide enough awake by now to recognise the Parson, but she looked for no sort of kindness from him,—she only waited until he should have done with

her, and expected each moment, from very force of habit, that a cut of his riding-whip would end the talk.

"From Goit Mill to Marshcotes—and she not seven yet, Royd," muttered the Parson.

"They begin at five years old to work—never younger than that," Royd put in drily. His feelings were stirred as deeply as the Parson's—more deeply perhaps, for he had been through Goit Mill by night and he remembered—but he would not show it.

"You must have a care, bairn," went on the Parson. "Do you know that we all but rode over you as we came up the hill?"

"I war asleep, sir," she answered simply. "Happen —happen ye'll beat me for't and hev done; I'm late home to mother as 'tis."

It was terrible to Parson Horrocks, this; if she had shrunk from the expected blow, it would have been better—but she waited with the consummate fearlessness of one who, at seven years of age, had gauged the last extremity of pain.

"Beat you for it? Why, what put that thought into your head?" he cried.

"He allus beats me when I fall asleep,"—pointing backward to the factory, which still looked at them with its red eyes. "I'm daft-like, he says; an' when I cannot spin no more, he beats me too."

The Parson put a strong arm about her and swung her to his saddle, and by the stars and the after-light of the moon he recognised her as a neighbour's child.

"Why, it's Lavrock's little lass, and a near neighbour of my own," he muttered. "She used to play about the

graves, Stephen, and grew to be a rare friend of mine; but I've missed her lately, and her folk seemed shy of answering my questions."

"Folk are who are driven to send their children to Goit Mill," Royd answered. "Yet I have heard about the child here only this morning, as it chanced, from her uncle at the Herders. He was right, I fancy, when he said that she was over-delicate to work at all."

The other answered nothing for awhile; he was watching the child's face, and he thought he saw on it the trace of recent tears.

"You have been crying, lass," he said gently. "Has the overlooker been beating you again?"

"I warn't crying for that," she put in quickly, with fresh apprehension; "it war becos th' boggarts came an' peeped at me as I came up Drowned Man's Loin —an' I couldn't run, I war that weariful. It warn't for being beaten 'at I cried," she repeated earnestly; "mother says I'se lose my job if I cry ivery time I'm hurt."

The Parson saw it all as in a picture—the long day's work—the growing sleepiness, which, to the childish brain, seemed altogether its own fault—the dark walk home, and the fear of lurking boggarts—and then the weariness that was too great even for a child's terrors, the weariness that by nature's mercy wrapped the mind about, while only battered instinct still kept awake sufficiently to take the tired limbs home.

"Why did you come home alone? Were there no other children leaving work?" he asked.

"Ay, sir—but I war kept a half-hour after they had

goan; for I like as I fall asleep fro' nooin to neet, an' th' overseer telled me I mun mak up for gooid time lost."

This, too, she told him in a dull, matter-of-fact way, as though there were nothing out of the usual in it—as though, indeed, she had no just cause of complaint against the overseer or any other man. He was a man of quick passions, the Parson, and the anger and the pity in him choked his voice when he tried to whisper consolation to the child. What were the parents doing? It was they who ought to feel resentment, since the child could not; and if bread were short, they had better beg it by the wayside or steal it from the rich than let such helpless mites as this become the wage-earners. Parson Horrocks had been gay enough an hour agone at Wynyates, and none would have looked for harshness under his twinkling eyes of grey; but now, with an impulse frankly savage, he fingered his heavy riding-whip, and longed to have the master of Goit Mill face to face with him.

The child, stupidly surprised that no blow of whip or hand had followed the Parson's questions, let sleep steal over her again and nestled close against the rider's arm, until the horse stumbled over a deep rut and half aroused her.

"Is't time to waken, father? Father, 'tis cowd and dark—let me lig a wee while longer," she murmured, thinking again that it was morning.

And anger left the Parson; for there seemed no place for anything but sorrow—sorrow, and a deeper sense of

pathos than he had realised in all his threescore years of life.

"They make bread of the children's tears, Stephen," he cried brokenly; "and we who have too much—shall we not have to give a reckoning for it in the time to come?"

But Royd made no answer; and if his thoughts were deep, he gave no inkling of it. His face was hard and cold as he rode on the Parson's bridle-hand, and when they reached the parting of the ways he bade him the curtest of good-nights. For he, too, was a factory master, and there were times when his own conscience—sneering at itself the while—took up the load of other masters' sins and counted them its own.

The Parson, soon as Royd had left him, rode straight up the lane this side the Parsonage, and stopped at the door of the topmost cottage. A woman stood on the threshold, shading a rushlight with one hand against the wind, and looking down the lane.

"I've brought your child home; I found her spent with weariness upon the road," was all he said, until he had carried the little one indoors and laid her on the lang-settle.

"An' thankee, Parson; I war getting flaired 'at summat hed come to her, for th' childer next door war home a half-hour sin'. What ails thee, lass?" she broke off, bending with rough solicitude above the settle.

The Parson stood looking at her for a while; he saw the dilated pupils of the eyes, hidden every other second

by the heavy lids; he saw the purple rings beneath the eyes, and the dead grey of the face that should have been a comely one, and a long red weal, as of a lash, all down the cheek; he remembered too the dull weight of her body as he lifted her from off the saddle. And on the sudden he turned round upon the mother, his eyes ablaze with a light that few men, and no other woman, in the parish had seen in them.

"Woman," he cried, "how in God's name dare you send such as this to kill herself for bread?"

It was the mother's turn to fire now. She lost her down-trodden, half-appealing look, and faced him across the child's prostrate body.

"How dare I, Parson?" she cried. "There's no dare or dare not in't. How dare I let her starve, an' let my husband starve, an' starve myseln? Jonas ligs up i' th' chamber wi' black fever, an' I've worn my shooin through wi' seeking wark, an' th' meal i' th' tub gets shallower ivery day."

"It is a crime to send her to Goit Mill. Are there no other masters in the parish? Stephen Royd, for one, would see that no child came to harm."

"Ay, but he willun't tak childer under ten; no gooid master will—an' so th' little uns mun all go to t'others." She gripped the settle-back with her hands, and stilled his passion by her own. "D'ye think we do't for choice?" she cried. "D'ye think it's nawther sin nor shame to me, as suckled th' little lass here, to gi'e her up to sich as Booth o' Goit Miln? God knows there'll be one more i' hell if prayers can send him there. But

it's no use, no use at all!" she broke off, losing heart and courage as suddenly as she had found them.

There was silence in the little, ill-kept room. Such things seemed flat denial of all faith in God, and the Parson groped with a blind man's helplessness through the dark ways of fact. The mother, proud once, and still too proud to beg, was shorn of all old self-reliance; she looked a slattern, and her sobs had in them all the slattern's helplessness. She showed all the outward signs, indeed, of what was meant by "hard times," the signs which Stephen Royd had seen not long ago in Lavrock of the Herders.

"He's hitten her i' a new place to-day," she murmured vaguely, leaning over to stroke the red weal on the child's face.

The child stirred. "I fell asleep while I war carrying bobbins," she said, "an' he lashed me. 'I'll waken thee,' he said, 'I'll waken thee!'"

A great sob broke from Parson Horrocks. "It cannot be!" he cried. "Nay, for every father in the moorside would rise and pull the stones of Goit Mill one from another!"

"An' what o' th' brass?" said the woman simply. "He has us which way we turn, has Ephraim Booth. We said our childer shouldn't wark for him; we framed a union amang ourselns—that war i' th' better days—an' there war nawther chick nor child i' Marshcotes went to th' miln. An' what did he say to that, Parson? We thowt it'd learn him to mend his ways, or beggar him—an' i'stead he goes to th' Heathley Workhouse,

an' gets a score o' pauper childer, an' calls 'em 'prentices. He keeps 'em there like pigs; an' now we're forced once an' again to send our childer to him, he pays 'em less nor iver."

Parson Horrocks felt the need for action; there was something he could do, and do at once, and only by that road did thought grow bearable.

"What has she had to eat to-day?" he asked.

"A pint o' porridge afore her breakfast; I hedn't no more meal to spare."

"Then set the kettle on, and I'll be back as soon as may be."

Another man would have left money, but the Parson never courted such easier ways of charity. Before long he was back again, with new milk, and eggs, and a bottle of brandy; he broke one of the eggs into a cup, and added milk and brandy, all with the deftness of one who had long since learned to minister to body-sickness as well as soul-sickness. Yet even as he lifted the child's head and held the mug for her to drink from, that quiet and terrible murmur rose once again to her lips.

"Is't time to waken, father? Father, is't time to waken?"

And when the Parson was at home again, the words clung to him obstinately. That phrase, "Is't time to waken?" had grown to be the first thought of the child's life, the only thought; it bounded all her dim horizon—that and the overlooker's lash. There was no rest, save a few hours' troubled sleep; no play, no momentary gleam of sunlight on the darker slopes of life.

The Parson, in all times of trouble or perplexity, repaired to the graveyard that shut the Parsonage in—the graveyard that was garden and God's Acre both to him. The sight of the quiet graves, the nearness of those whose fret was long since over, had always woven a deep spell of peace about him; and the lettered headstones were each a sermon, a romance, or a psalm of rest, according to his mood. But he found no peace to-night, though he walked up and down the paths for a long hour. He had heard strange things of Goit Mill, but to-night he had seen them in their grim reality; and, as he looked up at the old kirk-tower, the symbol of a life-long faith, a low and bitter cry escaped him. And in his heart he asked what God was doing; and for awhile he could find no answer, in this bitterest hour, save that God slept and heeded not.

Little Barbara, too, had suffered an awakening to-night. Soon as Royd and the Parson had bidden farewell to her in the parlour of the Grey House on the Hill, she went to the spinet, and tried to sing the ballad that had always been their favourite—hers and Stephen's; but she had no heart for it, and by and by she rose, and leaned her arms upon the spinet, and felt she knew not what—a pang of utter loneliness, and, following it, a deep, new joy in living. The Squire was busying himself, as his custom was, with looking to the fastenings of the doors. The creak of his footsteps down the passages, the rustle of the wind, were all that broke the stillness; but Barbara, as she leaned her forehead on her hands and looked from one familiar corner to another of the room—the embroidery-frame,

the great chair with its padded arms, the bowl of rose-leaves—felt a strange novelty about it all. It was as if she had come back from a far journey, and was glad of the new freshness lying over all the old home landmarks; the world, too, had grown in stature surely, and showed her fancy twenty traits of worthiness where she had never thought to look for them. For awhile she stood there wondering, not knowing that the world was the same as it had always been, hid for the moment by gossamer that she herself had woven; it was the breathless moment of suspense and expectation, and innocent withdrawal, which comes not twice to any woman. And then her face slipped down between her hands, and a crimson flush ran over face and hands; she recalled how she had sat in the old childish way and sought Royd's confidence and given her own in fair exchange; and the shame of it was on her still when the Squire, a look of sad perplexity about his eyes, came softly in at the half-open door.

"You are tired, Babette," he said, putting an arm about her and losing half his own trouble in the need to solace hers. "Run up to bed, child, and save the hour of beauty-sleep that's left."

He did not follow her at once, but moved about the room with faltering steps. "There'll be no need for me to work to-night—no need to-night," he murmured. "Poor little Barbara! How she tries to win the secret from me—how she tries! and God knows how willingly I'd share it with her—if it were possible."

It was Barbara, not he, who was to waste the night-hours in watching. Her casement was open to the

wind, and she sat looking out upon the lone, grey fields, not heeding that the night was cold. She understood it now, that passionate storm of sobs which Royd had interpreted amiss; and, while her heart was glad, her pride was strangely hurt. Glamour was ousted by new-awakened fears, and fear again gave place to hopefulness. But one thing was sure—Stephen and she could never again take up the comradeship which that night's work had killed.

Little Barbara was at last a woman grown.

CHAPTER IV

IN THE GARDEN OF THE GRAVES

SPRING was whispering to the moor again; in the hollows buds were breaking into leafy spray, though on the crest of every dingle white winter stayed for one last glance upon the kingdom she had ruled so long. The wind was free and sharp, and on the streams the sunlight danced with silver feet. Even the rough house, that looked from the moor-edge over the bare upper-half of Hazel Dene, seemed to be thinking of its youth this morning, and smoothed its wrinkles to the sunlight. Half cottage, half farmstead, it raised a square, uncompromising shoulder against the spur of heath that carried the house of Withens on its topmost edge; and the land about it was neither peat nor pasture, but a stubborn mixture of the two.

A strange figure came out of the doorway, and crossed the trampled yard—a lean body of a man, set on a pair of spindle legs, with half the head and all the shoulders hidden by a sack of wool. One hand held the sack in its place, the other carried a tin oil-can; and from underneath the sack a sharp face, full of drollery, looked out upon the sunlit slopes and winked its one useful eye. There was no mistaking the likeness between the man and the unwashed cur that followed at his heels. The man's right eye was covered by a patch,

the terrier's had a black patch of hair in faithful imitation; and in every movement of dog and master there was the same devil-may-care, good-humoured readiness for frolic.

Tim o' Tab's had lived at Benty Farm here all his life, and many another Earnshaw before him; and he was as proud of the ramshackle place as ever Squire Cunliffe was of Wynyates, or Stephen Royd of the home he was slaving to win back. The difference was that his betters were proud of house and name alike, while Tim had never really known the dignity of a surname; there were too many Earnshaws scattered here and there about the moors, and the neighbours had always found it simpler to name him Tim o' Tab's, after old Tabitha Earnshaw, the widowed mother who had worked herself into a restless grave by toiling for Tim's welfare.

"Squire hes lacked me sorely," mused Tim, as he moved with long uneasy strides beneath his burden. "Ay, he war thinner i' th' face nor I liked to see when I spake wi' him yestreen. An' all because there's a chap at Lanshaw Brigg that willun't let folk tak his game i' peace. Well, well, there's nowt so queer as folk, an' th' keepers cost a sight more nor th' game they save, if only th' gentle-folk 'ud look at it sensible like."

Flick, the terrier, started a rabbit from the warren at the field-top, and Tim o' Tab's was never the man to let a chance of sport go by. Leaning against the wall, he unshouldered his pack of wool and watched the rabbit's scut twinkle for a moment at the mouth of its burrow,

then disappear just as Flick's teeth came together with an anxious snap.

"Tha'rt a fooil," said Tim to his dog, with good-tempered unconcern. "I allus did say I'd hev made a better dog nor thee, if I'd nobbut hed the legs. Nay, tha'll addle nowt by barking, lass. Barking niver hurt fur nor feather, an' niver will, as Dick the weaver said when he hit his nattering wife over th' head wi' th' end of a peggy-stick."

The terrier looked up into his face, and then was silent; for she could bear kicks from another man better than mockery from Tim o' Tab's. Tim stretched himself, and looked about him at the strife of spring and winter which rarely ends with April on the uplands. A lamb, new-born, was trying its ungainly legs, and its fleece was white as the drift of snow that still lingered on the east side of the wall behind it. But the snow was sure to go, and Tim o' Tab's found nothing much amiss with the world as he stooped to shoulder his wool-pack once again.

He left the steep fields by and by, and crossed the stream, and kept along the brown peat-track that hugged the farther margin. There was a new warmth here, and larch and rowan waved their first frail leaves against the dappled sky; but Tim's eyes were on the ground, or on the water, for the signs of hare and conie, the print of bird's feet on the peat or the stir of a brown back among the water-weeds, were more to him than any casual beauties of sky and leafage.

"Begow, but we mun hev a bit o' sport, wool or no

wool," he said to his dog, as they neared the well-known pool beneath the firs.

Doffing his rough-spun jacket, and rolling his shirt-sleeves well up above the elbow, he crept softly to the bank. The pool was shallow enough in the middle, but on this side it had worn a track deep under the bank and wound darkly in and out between the roots of alder-trees and hazel. Tim stretched himself at full length above the brink—the terrier watching with grave alertness—and gently let his right hand drop into the water. With a patience he could rarely compass when work was to be done, he moved the hand up through the shadowed water near the edge until it disappeared among the alderroots; the fingers meanwhile were working softly to and fro, light as driftweed on the current, until they touched the cold, smooth belly of a trout. The dog, watching Tim's face, knew that the prey was found, and her tail first stiffened, then swung from side to side with ill-suppressed excitement. And still Tim's fingers rubbed tenderly against the brown trout's belly, until, with one quick jerk, he lifted him clean out of the stream and on to the soft bank.

The terrier's self-restraint was over now. She was through the stream before Tim had well got to his feet again, and was racing round the trout in a fury of delight.

"Ay, tha'rt a rare un to bark, as I telled thee," cried Tim; "but it's me that's catched th' fish, lass—by th' Heart, but I niver saw a finer trout, in or out o' Hazel Beck, an' that's gospel."

There was a stir of broken twigs behind him, and a light footfall on the last year's leaves. Tim was jealous of intrusion at these times, but his first distrustful glance was changed to a smile of welcome as he saw the slim figure on the bank. It was little Barbara —Barbara, leaning against a rowan-trunk, and watching the progress of Tim's sport with an eagerness as great almost as the terrier's.

"That was very cleverly done, Tim," she laughed. "Do you—do you think you could teach me how to do it one day?"

Tim o' Tab's touched the greasy, close-fitting cap which he always wore when carrying wool. "There was niver a fair day yet, Mistress Barbara, but what was fairer by th' half for the sight o' ye," he said, with a frank look of affection.

The girl only laughed a little, and picked a sprig of elder leaves. They were secure enough in birth and breeding, the Cunliffes, to meet gentle or simple on equal terms; and Tim had always been a kind of honoured jester at Wynyates, privileged to say his say in the fashion that best pleased him.

"That is not giving a fair answer to my question, Tim," she said. "I doubt you fear my rivalry if once you teach me how to tickle fish. Ah, there's Flick! Well, then, Flick—you needn't lick my hand away."

"It's a hand that's fed her weel of late, an' thankee for't," said Tim, glancing at his restless comrade. "What war agate wi' her, Mistress Barbara, to come an' plague ye all at Wynyates, as she did six weeks sin'?"

Barbara glanced quickly at him, then fell to rolling her elder leaves into little balls. "I think it was because she had lost you, and knew that you were often to be found at Wynyates," she answered slowly. "Strange, was it not, that she stayed so close to father all that evening and all the next day after, till we missed her at sundown? Oh, Tim, we were so fearful she was lost; and when father came in, last night, after seeing you, and said that Flick was with you, I was so glad—because, you know, you'd never be the same Tim again if Flick were gone."

Instinctively Tim reached down a hand and patted the dog with a rough tenderness. "Nay, I'm none so sure," he said. "She hes varry little sense for a dog, hesn't Flick; she mud a'most be a human, she's that scant o' wit. First, to go fly-by-skying up an' dahn the moorside, when she should hev known I war ligging snug at th' Herders; then, to beg vittals an' a lodging fro' them as niver axed her; an', last of all, to come worriting back to th' Herders same as if nowt hed happened, like,—nay, nay, ye tak my word for't she'll walk on two legs by an' by, will Flick, for it's no use her reckoning to be a dog. Not but what I war pleased to see her, for I allus had a bit of a soft spot i' my heart for a fooil."

Again Barbara laughed, for the set of Tim's head and the merry look in his eye gave a droll flavour to anything he said.

"See how you keep me gossiping," she cried, turning to go down the path; "and we dine at two, Tim, and I have to get to Marshcotes Parsonage and back."

Tim glanced at the sun. "Ye've time an' to spare, Mistress Barbara. Ye'll be taking th' road past Hazel Miln I reckon? I war by way o' taking some combings there myseln," he added, stuffing the trout into a bulgy pocket of his coat and shouldering his wool-pack.

Barbara flushed at mention of Hazel Mill. Her easiest road to Marshcotes lay through the mill-yard, and in the old days she would have welcomed the chance of meeting the master of it as she passed; but something had chanced to little Barbara since then, and Stephen Royd was less and greater than a comrade.

"I am tired of the road through Hazel Dene," she said, with a sudden coolness that startled Tim o' Tab's. "I shall take the path up the fields here, Tim, and cross by Cuckoo Farm."

Tim shifted the wool a little on his shoulders and looked up at her as well as he could for the overhanging thatch of sacking.

"Axing your pardon, Mistress Barbara," he said, "there's summat wrang. Ye doan't sound best pleased, an' as there's only me an' you i' th' wood, I reckon it mun be me that's angered ye."

"You, Tim?" she echoed, with the old clear laugh. "Why, what could you have done to anger me? It was not that at all—it was only— Good-bye, Tim, and don't forget you are to teach me one day how to tickle trout."

She waved a hand at him, and started up the winding track which generation after generation of the hill-sheep had trodden across the gnarled fields. She was not thinking now of Stephen Royd, and the flush in her cheeks,

though it grew brighter with each step, owned no master save the sunshine and the merry western wind. So well she knew this grey, bare land, with its jagged line of walls, its narrow sheep-stiles; so well she knew the hand of spring upon it, and the clean wholesomeness of scant, late-greening turf and budding heath. The marshes to be circumvented, too, with the brackish odour that the sun sucked from them—the brambles catching at her frock—the breathless, slippery scrambles up the steep angles of the hill—were they not part and parcel of old recollection and delight?

She would never be sad again, thought Barbara. How dared she be, with larks to sing before her, and thrushes piping from the dappled sunshine of the wood below? The birds and she were wise—they knew the beauty of the world. But she had reached the ridge-top now, and stopped to gain her breath again; and the long back of Hazel Mill showed through the fretwork of spring leaves beneath; and Barbara's face grew soft with sudden pathos.

For a long while she stood, looking wistfully upon the scene and listening to the sleepy humming of the water-wheel. She had chosen to avoid the mill; yet every detail of its precincts, hidden by the trees, was twice as clearly pictured in her mind as the grey pasture-land which so lately had delighted her. She could see it all so plainly, with the exquisite second-sight of retrospect: the trim garden round about the mill walls; the dark mysterious cavern in which the green and slippery boxes of the wheel revolved; the treble row of ponds, one under the other, with the wind-wrinkled water in

the middle, and the thorn-trees dipping wide across the outer rim; the goit, lined with moss and fern and early primroses, which carried the water to the wheel. The tears rushed to her eyes, and fell unheeded; for the scene down yonder, so clearly pictured, seemed to sum up all her youth, and all her childish voyagings—with Stephen Royd as fairy prince and hero—through the tangles of the wonder-world which children make of little things. What a breathless horror there had been about the water-wheel, toiling with goblin-like ferocity for the man who had tamed its brute strength to usefulness; had she not looked for a dragon to come out of that shadowy place, with its never-ceasing groans and deep lap-lap of water racing from its prison-house? Nay, had she not seen Stephen slay this dragon more than once or twice, and crowned him prince with a wreath of those same primroses which nestled in the wet banks of the goit?

And that was over and done with now. The wheel was a thing of wood and iron, a hard, unlovely drudge that worked to make money for her fairy prince; and the prince himself was grown older, graver; and between herself and him there could no longer be any of the unashamed communion which dies with childish dreams.

Little Barbara picked her basket up, and turned toward Marshcotes with a slower step; and it was not until she neared the kirkyard that her wonted gaiety broke through the sadness and laughed it out of court. Parson Horrocks, seated in the study of the Parsonage,

whose window overlooked the yard, caught sight of his visitor soon as she came in at the moor-gate; and he watched her pick her way between the graves with tender care for those who slept beneath.

"Ay, 'tis like the maid," he murmured, wishing the journey were a longer one that so he might have more of her unstudied grace. "Those who honour the living are ever kindly toward the dead. See how she stoops to weed the dockens from the daisies on yonder grave; I warrant old Jasper Royd—the rogue—sleeps softer on his sins for the tread of little Barbara above his earth."

The Parson rose and hurried down the stair, lest Barbara should knock before the door was ready with its welcome; and he opened to her just as she was lifting one brown hand to the knocker. He had a rugged face, the Parson, full of queer knobs and unexpected wrinkles; and when he showed pleasure there was no man in the parish who could exhibit it so broadly. This morning every knob, every wrinkle, seemed to have a droll aspect of its own, as he stood and eyed his visitor.

"No wonder I enjoyed fair dreams last night," said he, keeping her still on the doorstep because a shaft of sunlight had found her there, interpreting the slender dignity of face and figure. "I wondered what the meaning was—till little Barbara came to play the soothsayer."

"Indeed, sir, I can claim no such dignity," she answered curtseying gravely, "for I came only to

tell you spring was really here at last, and to bring you a sitting of eggs for the speckled hen. I promised them a week since, did I not?"

"And so you did, child; but surely you've not come all the way from Wynyates to bring me them?"

Barbara did not wait his customary invitation to enter, but crossed the threshold and laid both hands on his shoulder, with the impulsive warmth that womanhood would never kill in her. "I came for a gossip, Parson Horrocks," she laughed—"a gossip with the oldest friend I have. The morning was so bright, and —and perhaps I thought I needed some excuse, so brought the eggs to keep me in good countenance. Were you at work? It is Friday, now I come to think of it—and there is your sermon—"

"Ay, I was in the middle of it just now. The first of John, third verse, little Barbara, 'Husbands, love your wives,' and so forth. My flock is over deep in money-making nowadays"—he glanced shrewdly at her, and was well content to see the wild roses steal unbidden to her cheeks—"and they need some wholesome physic. I'm going to preach on marriage, child, for we are in poor case if we forget its virtues."

"I must not stay then, sir. I—I should not like to keep you from your sermon," said Barbara, with a confusion which seemed altogether needless.

The Parson laughed, a round, jolly laugh. "It will be sweeter for the gossip you have come to seek," he answered, opening the parlour-door for her and bowing her in. "See, child, it is too fair a day to spend indoors; you shall have a glass of wine, and then we'll

go and watch the throstles building in the kirkyard trees. There are three nests a-building already, for I counted them yestreen."

He took a wineglass from the oaken rack, and a blue decanter from the press. A seed-cake too, he found, for his own needs were slight and he had always leisure to see that little luxuries were kept at hand for such visitors as Barbara.

"A glass of honest port would better meet the case," he grumbled, as he watched her sip her elderberry wine; "but you were always settled in your likes and dislikes, Barbara. Besides, my housekeeper says that Heaven makes the elderberries grow so thick up here, where little else will grow, and so she argues there's a use for them. And how would the moral thrive, eh, Barbara, if you never came to help me with the precious stuff?"

Barbara laughed, as she munched her slice of seed-cake—looking much like a child who is playing a game of stately calls—and took a bigger sip in token of defiance. "I never enjoy any wine so much as yours, and your housekeeper is right," she said. "Parson Horrocks, I am so hungry after my walk, do you think I might finish your cake for you?"

There was only a small wedge left, and after it was finished they went out together into the half-acre that was dearer to the Parson than any land in Marshcotes. Below, there was the peace of dead men who had found a welcome rest; above, the eager stir of birds, the fall of brown shells from breaking leaf-buds, the dance of midges in the sun-rays, were eloquent of the life which

will not call death's certainty to mind. Down by the Bull tavern, the sexton was whistling as he banked the sods above a new-made grave.

"A man of his hands, the sexton yonder," said Parson Horrocks, pointing down the path. "He can dig and plank and make all smooth again,—but he has no philosophy, Barbara. Yet there's all the world in this old kirkyard, if he would but see it."

Barbara nodded quietly as she went with him from one weather-blackened headstone to another. It was the Parson's hobby this, and he prided himself on knowing the life-stories, the foibles and sins and virtues, of half the folks who in the last end of all had come to claim their share of good peat-earth. No name upon the stones but brought some old tale to his lips; and there were few hours to Barbara like these she spent in company with the Parson and the Parson's dead. For the folk were her own folk, bred on the same niggard uplands, under the like roof of storm and sun and wind, and the temper of their minds was familiar as the scent of prickly gorse to her.

"Ay, and old Jasper Royd lies here," said the Parson, stopping for the twentieth time. "You plucked a weed or two from out the daisies, Barbara, as you came through."

Again the colour stole into her face. "He did not die gently, sir; I think he's earned a little tenderness," she said.

"Die gently? It was a martyrdom. Think of it, Barbara! Jasper the free-handed, Jasper the reckless,

who had done every foolish thing on earth, but never a cowardly one—before—"

He glanced at Barbara, leaning on his arm, and at the sunlit sky, and he stopped, ashamed of the dark story hidden here.

But Barbara would not let him halt there, for the tale left half told seemed harsher than its wont. "He killed himself," she added quietly. "I was born that same summer, and the memory of it, kept green for many a year among the country folk, seems part of my own childhood."

"Ay, ay, your nurse would point you out the tree in Conie Crag ravine, I warrant, under which they found him. It is haunted still, they say. Do you know, child, that I was the first to pass that way and see him lying on his side?"

Her hand tightened on his arm. "I did not know," she whispered.

"He was far gone by that time, and he could scarce open his eyes when I knelt beside him and felt for the wound. 'I never blinked at a fence before,' he muttered, 'but, Parson, I could not face this last.' And then he died, with a new fear in his eyes—fear of his own cowardice."

"Yet the excuse, sir!"

"Ay, to be sure, the excuse," echoed Parson Horrocks softly. "He was a good friend to me, little Barbara, and I like to hear a maid plead tenderly for him. But he could find no plea for himself in that last hour. He had held his head high to all the world,

had kept an open door for the drunkard and the prudent, the poacher and the magistrate; he had courted his name of Jasper the Moonrake, and had borne it well." The Parson glanced again at the lettered headstone and sighed. "Poor Jasper! There was a man's heart under all the folly. Yet, when the ruin came, and the mortgages were pressed, and he had not even a crown to toss his poacher-friend at drinking-time—why, he could not look disaster in the face. None knows as I do what those few dying words meant; there were days of heart-burn in them, Barbara, and a last full hour of shame."

"Yet the daisies grow as round here, and as white, as on his neighbour's grave. Has he not paid in full, Parson? Ay, surely he has paid in full."

The Parson touched her gently on the shoulder. "There's no one gives me logic half as sweet as Barbara," he said. Then, with another sigh, "Ah, well! 'Tis done with, child, and you'll wonder why I spoil the sunshine with such talk. Perhaps I was thinking of Stephen, Jasper's only son; perhaps I had heard that folk were beginning to call him hard and shy of fellowship. Could he be less, with this behind him?"

Little Barbara lifted her head with sudden pride. "Let them name him what they will!" she cried. "Do you care, or do I care what they say?"

"Sometimes,—an old man's fancies are very wayward, child,—sometimes I thought you found him less of a comrade than he has been. He holds himself too much aloof; that is his pride, which comes red-hot from old Jasper—but behind it there's his mother's breed,

and it will carry him higher up the ladder than any of us dream of, Barbara."

Parson Horrocks had learned as much as it is good for a man to know of women; but he was startled when Barbara dropped her eyes, and loosed her fingers from his arm, and laughed, the lowest laugh that ever broke a silence.

"It seems so strange," she said, a moment after— "so strange to hear you plead for Stephen—plead with me, who—"

"Finish your sentence, child. You're growing worldly," put in the other with irritable eagerness.

She met his glance, and his disquiet deepened to see its roguishness. "To plead with me, who almost learned to walk from him. He used to teach me how to find the nests of snipe and grouse and partridge, and why the aspens turn white faces to the wind when rain is coming—"

"Would God he'd teach you more!" broke in the Parson. "You are a grown woman now, Barbara, and he— Heaven pity me," he broke off; "I never thought to suffer from an unruly tongue."

For Barbara had lost her roguishness, had lost her pride; and it seemed to Parson Horrocks that grief so voiceless and instinctive could never be assuaged. Yet he took heart again, when, a half-hour later, he had bidden farewell to Barbara at the gate; since from his sufficient acquaintance with women he gathered that one deep hope of his was like to be fulfilled.

"Ay, but will Stephen ever know?" he muttered, returning to his interrupted sermon. "The lad is

stubborn—it would be like him to think that pride stood in the way and so pave a road for some rival to walk over."

Tim o' Tab's meanwhile, had watched Barbara go up the slope of Hazel Dene, and had resumed his journey to the mill.

"Nay, I cannot make cheese nor chalk on't," he muttered, shaking his head. "Through th' miln-yard is her gainest road, and yet she wodn't come wi' me. It isn't 'at she's ower proud to wend side by side wi' Tim o' Tab's, for pride she hes none, save of a sort I like to see; an' it isn't because I said owt to hurt her, for she'd hev telled me quick enow if it hed been. What ails th' maid, I wonder?"

Finding no answer to his question, he trudged stolidly forward, with Flick the terrier following no less sedately at his heels, until he reached the mill. Stephen Royd had just dismounted from his horse, and stood in the yard with the bridle in his hand talking to one of the men; the horse's flanks were creamed with lather, but Royd himself looked cool as if another than himself had ridden a score of miles since breakfast. From one side sounded the stifled thunder of the water-wheel, from the other came the pleasant rattle of the spinning-frames.

"Morning to ye, Maister Royd! It's a littlish while sin' me an' ye hed dealings one wi' t'other," cried Tim cheerily.

Royd turned sharply on his heel. "Oh, you, is it?" he said, dismissing his companion with a nod, and waiting until Tim came up.

"Ay, it's me an' th' dog—or two chaps fearful like us. I've browt ye eight-and-twenty pund or so o' combings, maister."

"Well, it is about time you did, if it comes to that. How long have you had the wool, Tim? Six weeks, or somewhere near it."

"There's a Providence aboon us, Maister Royd," said Tim, with a large gravity; "an' when Providence says a chap hes getten to break his arm, he's getten to do it, choose what comes to a stone or two o' wool. Howsiver, it's joined again, hes th' arm, an' happen a poor man, wi' his living to addle, 'll be let do a bit of honest work."

"Especially if he keeps clear of Wyecollar Dene, and other places where the hares breed thick," put in Royd drily. "Open that sack of yours, Tim," he broke off, with prompt return to business.

Tim o' Tab's let the wool-pack slip from his shoulders to the ground, and pulled out the skewers that held it. The combings lay in two-foot lengths of fleecy whiteness, and the sunlight, shining down full upon the mill-yard, spun fairy webs of mother-of-pearl among the fibres of the wool. Not the foam that danced on the brown surface of the beck, nor the rich bloom of the pear-tree climbing up the south wall of the mill, could show a whiter or a fairer aspect than these few pounds of carefully combed fleece; indeed, the beauty of the fabric on which Royd's trade was built, no less than the clean and homely aspect of the mill, might well have reconciled a man less prejudiced than Squire Cunliffe, or than Royd himself, to the new god that had

arisen in Marshcotes parish. The wool was all combed by hand outside the precincts of the mill; it was woven by hand, likewise, in one or other of the moorland cottages; all that the mill had to do was to spin the delicate threads of these white combings into yarn—and brown peat water, fresh from the windy uplands, did all the hard work that was needful.

But Royd had never seen beauty in a fleece, unless it were growing on a sheep's back; it was to him the symbol of his trade, whenever he paused to give other than a money-meaning to it, and as such he welcomed and disdained it. As he took up a sliver of the wool this morning and ran it through his fingers, its softness brought a look of quiet pleasure to his face; and this meant that it would one day fetch a high market-price when woven into cloth.

"Tim," said he, putting down the wool and turning his back on it in his own abrupt, imperious way, "the devil only knows how you do it, with your slip-shod views of work, but there's not a comber in the parish who brings me work like yours—so little moil and such a length of top, and the sliver smooth as beeswax!"

"Folk are a queer lot, an' that's gospel," said Tim, glancing sideways at his dog. "I tak pains at nowt else i' this life, Maister Royd, but when I get a bit o' wool atween my fingers—why I'll mother it fair like a lass wi' her first babby. Mebbe I'm wide o' th' truth a bit," he added softly; "for Squire's sake I munnot seem less nor a gooid workman."

"Well, it pays me to keep a workman of that kid-

ney, and it pays me to make it worth his while. Tim o' Tab's, do you mean to stick to your comb and pot in future?"

Again Tim looked at his dog, the companion of ancient frolics.

"It's axing a lot," he murmured. "It's axing a fearful deal, maister."

"And I'm offering you a good price for it, on condition you keep to it month in and month out. Did you ever hear that Stephen Royd thought to make money by buttoning up his pocket?"

"Not when there war a crown to be added by ivery shilling he took out," responded Tim, with a droll twisting of the mouth-corners. "Nay, Stephen Royd deals fair, an, allus did, by them 'at shovels in the brass for him. It's a poor rider as starves his own nag's belly."

Royd laughed drily. "And a poor horse that doesn't know its own stable. It cuts both ways, Tim o' Tab's. Well, what say you? I'll give you a shilling a stone more for combings, on condition you never bring less that a good sackful every week."

"A shilling a stone?" echoed Tim. "That'll be addling brass, an' proper. It's a big rise, maister—ower big to be true, I should hev said, if another than ye hed telled me on't."

"It's waiting for you, if you care to take it. I meant to offer it you long since, but you chose to break an arm instead of coming for it."

A silence fell between them; but it was clear from Royd's air that he had not finished yet with Tim.

"I rode to Bradford this morning on business," he said presently, with a steady glance at Tim o' Tab's.

"An' rode at a fairish pace if your mare be owt to go by."

"They are talking wildly in Bradford—the combers, I mean. They say we are giving them less than a living wage, and there's talk of such a strike as has never been known before. Six months ago they carried Bishop Blaize in procession through the town, and shouted themselves hoarse because their trade was as good as they could ask for; to-day they snarl like wolves when a master brushes past them in the street. The combers are weather-cock fools who shift with every wind."

"Well, I know nowt mich myseln about sich-like matters, though I'm spry when it comes to knowing wheer a pheasant nests. But I've heard say it's trade that shifts wi' ivery wind, an' th' combers are like to follow when their bite an' sup depends on't."

"And doesn't my bite and sup depend on it? D'ye think we starve you for frolic, or that we get better work from an ill-fed man? Listen to me, Tim o' Tab's. There will be a strike in Bradford, and a big one; and I mean to keep going while other mills are lying idle; and you can let them know in Marshcotes and Ling Crag that I'll have no frothy talk of the town-sort up here on the moors."

There was a twinkle in Tim's eye, and a frown across his brows, for he disliked the drift of Royd's curt command, at the same time that he warmed to the man's sturdy temper.

"I'll let 'em know," he said,—"but whether they'll hearken, maister, is th' egg i' another nest."

"Hearken? They'll have to hearken, or I'll come with a hunting-crop and ask them for their arguments. Now I've business to attend to. Is it to be regular work and an advance of a shilling a stone, or no work at all?"

"It's to be regular work," said Tim, after a pause; "an' I tak your meaning, Maister Royd, square as it's meant. There shall none i' Ling Crag quarrel wi' their bread if I hev ony say in't. I'll carry four stone back wi' me this week, if it's all th' same to ye, for I'm fain o' wark after ligging idle for so long."

Tim was too sharp this once, for he was wrong altogether in his surmise that Royd was offering him a bribe because he had chanced to name the strike so soon after promising an advanced wage. The master of Hazel Mill had always been far-sighted enough to encourage a skilled workman, and he had in mind to raise Tim's price long before any whisper of a strike had gone abroad. A bribe of the sort Tim fancied was another matter, and Royd would as soon have stooped to pick a pocket. He had mentioned the strike this morning because it was uppermost in his own thoughts, and because Tim o' Tab's, as the acknowledged favourite of the moorside, was better able than any man in Marshcotes to lead opinion among the workers. He was puzzled for a moment as he saw the confidential look in the rogue's face; then, with a shrug, dismissed the matter, well-satisfied that he had Tim's promise.

Tim was in his most leisurely mood this morning,

despite his boasted eagerness for work; and even as he fastened up his pack of wool, preparatory to carrying it into the mill, he paused to take a long glance at the sky. He wished to know if it would be dark or light to-night upon the moors.

"There's a tidy sup o' rain brewing up yonder, Maister Royd," he said, pushing the last skewer into place. "I'm hoping th' little mistress willun't tak a wetting."

Royd had got into the saddle again, and was already bringing his horse round, but Tim's careless gossip brought him to a halt. There was no mistaking who the "little mistress" was, for it was the title which affection gave her from Wyecollar to Marshcotes.

"Why? is she abroad to-day?" he asked, and frowned at the impulse which had bidden him ask the question.

"Oh, ay, she's ower at th' Parsonage, for I met her up i' th' Dene a while back. She mud as weel hev come through th' miln-yard here, but it like as it suited her fancy to go by Cuckoo Farm."

Tim o' Tab's, glancing carelessly at Royd, was struck by his silence and the still way he sat his saddle, and more surprised to see with what sudden spleen he drove the spurs into his overridden horse.

"That war a bit of his father," mused Tim. "He's wilful as a stalk of ling, is Stephen Royd, for all his coolness; an' he sits a horse, Lord save him, as a horse likes to be sat. By th' Heart, but it's when a man gets o' horseback 'at ye can measure up his breed. There's Bancroft now, his legs an' his body an' his horse

doan't own no kinship, like; an' by that token his father went on foot, I reckon."

"So Barbara shuns the mill at last, does she?" muttered Royd, as he breasted the steep lane that led to the moor. "Ah, well, I knew it must be so one day; I knew it when she sang to me that night in the old parlour—but I scarce looked for it so soon."

The news he had brought back this morning from Bradford, the certainty in his own mind that there would be a strike before the year was out, offered him food enough for thought; but he could not bring his mind to bear on it. He could only remember how often Barbara had passed Hazel Mill on her way to Marshcotes Parsonage, how often she had stopped to peep in at the busy spinning-frames and to ask the master if he had any message for the old Parson who was equally a friend to both. Wilful he was, this master-weaver, as Tim o' Tab's had said, and wilfully sensitive to slights; and it would have taken a week of argument to persuade him that Barbara had any but the one motive for avoiding Hazel Mill.

CHAPTER V

A WATERSIDE WOOING

TIM O' TAB'S had delivered his combings to the foreman of the mill, had received a fresh supply of the raw wool, had washed it and packed it up; and as he went out of the yard he seemed to be carrying the self-same burden he had brought to Hazel Mill, save that this second pack was bulkier, and that it bowed his shoulders farther forward as he walked. He did not take the path up the Dene, however, but followed the stream's course till it brought him to the stile over against Smithbank Farm, and so into the cart-track known as Water Lane. For there was no gainsaying that spring was in the air, and Tim's thoughts were of a lass with red-ripe cheeks and saucy eyes.

He was just turning to go through the farmyard when the sound of hoofs came hollow from the stone bridge below; and Tim changed colour when he saw the upright figure and grave, old-world face of Squire Cunliffe. He stood there shiftlessly for awhile; then, as the horseman came up the hill and reined in on seeing him, he drew near his stirrup, while Flick the terrier came up too for greeting.

"A fair day, Squire, an' a busy one for me, as ye'll be seeing," he said.

The Squire glanced up and down the road, and his face seemed to lose a little of its drawn look when he saw that Tim and he had the cart-road to themselves. Each looked at the other then, and a kind of shame was in the glance of each,—proud shame in the Squire's, and self-excusing shiftiness in Tim's.

"I am glad to see you at your work again," said the old man, with plain effort.

"There's none fainer than myseln, an' that's gospel, Squire. I'm allus getting into some scrape, seemingly, choose what I do."

"You must not think I blame you, Tim. I—I have no right to do that. But if you remembered that your health is my health, your sickness my sickness—it may be that you would have more care. But then I said as much to you yesternight, did I not?"

Humility sat ill upon the Squire, and Tim o' Tab's was troubled by it. "A gooid word 'ull bear saying twice. It's noan that I'm war nor my neighbours," he went on eagerly; "I like as I step into ivery trap, when another man, 'ud hev th' luck to walk round t'other side on't. But I'll mend, I will—I'll mend, Squire, if I niver hev to look sideways at a hare again. D'ye think I've forgotten how ye fund me on Ling Crag Moor, lost i' th' snow, an' how ye set me afront ye on your horse? I was littlish then, Squire, but it sticks, does yond memory. An' it doan't seem mich o' ye to axe—it doan't seem mich 'at I should keep what trouble I can fro' ye."

The shame in the Squire's face gave place to a softer look; he looked a younger man, and a kindlier, as he

let his eyes dwell on Tim o' Tab's. "Art a good lad, Tim—the best in Marshcotes, for all thy faults," he muttered.

"Nay, now! Nay, Squire! There's Flick there winking for varry devilment when she hears sich praise o' Tim o' Tab's. Howsiver there's encouragement for work," he broke off, with another sidelong glance. "Maister Royd war i' a spendthrift mood this morn, for he offered me a shilling more a stone for combings."

"That is good hearing," said the Squire, with a wintry smile. "A shilling a stone? You'll be a rich man by and by. How comes it, Tim? Mr. Royd does not part lightly with his money."

"Nay, there's talk of a strike down Bradforth way, an' I reckon Maister Royd thinks to tak th' wind out o' th' combers' sails up here, by gi'eing what they want afore they axe for't."

The old Squire's mouth went harder, and his voice deepened.

"They say we gentlefolk know nothing of the poor man's hardships," he said softly, and stopped, and looked very wistfully at Tim o' Tab's.

"They're wrang time an' time," Tim ventured.

"Ay, for I wonder there's not a strike at every twelve-month' end. They sell their sweat for a pittance, and thank the masters for allowing them to live at all,—and— Nay, Tim, I must not turn radical just because trade has come into the parish," he broke off, laughing gently.

Tim was hard put to it to find words; for the Squire's laugh was sad as the burden of his words,—a burden

that only these two understood,—these two, the Squire, with his proud air of breeding which no kindliness of face could hide, and the ill-clad ne'er-do-weel with the patched eye that bore witness to some long-past and desperate affray at poaching. It was a scene incongruous, and the sunlight, flooding all the dip of Water Lane, seemed to bring out and emphasise the hundred points of difference between this ill-matched couple.

"Squire," said the younger man at last, swinging his oil-can softly to and fro and watching it strike flashes from the sun,—"Squire, I wodn't hev you tak a little thing so mich to heart. What if us poor men sell our sweat? We're born to't, same as ducks is born to watter, an' it's better to sell nor to gi'e for naught, if ye come to think on't. It 'ud be different for sich as ye, now—varry different—an' ye cannot no way put yourselns i' our place."

"It may not be," muttered the other. "It may not be, Tim."

"As weel try to rear an eagle i' a hen roost. Th' hens are suited weel enow, but th' eagle 'ud fret itseln to death, I reckon. Eh, Squire, but it's a queer world! An' things is most on 'em wrang side uppermost."

The Squire sighed as he looked up the lane; and then his proud face quivered on the sudden, for not five-score yards away was Bancroft of the Heights, riding at a foot-pace down the hill and smiling in his own empty fashion at the scene below him. Tim, following the direction of the other's glance, screwed his mouth up sourly and turned about.

"I'll bid ye gooid-day, Squire," he said. "Maister

Bancroft like as he fears to get muckied by touching sich as me, and—"

"You will come to-night?" broke in the Squire, stooping to Tim's ear.

"To-neet, Squire, if all goes well; an' gooid luck to ye," he added impulsively.

Ashamed of his warm rush of feeling toward the Squire, he went through the farm-yard at a brisk pace, nor did he once turn back, but growled to himself as he walked, and wished another than fool Bancroft of the Heights had seen them.

"Why, Squire, well met upon the road!" cried Bancroft, coming down the hill at an uneasy half-trot, and pulling up his thoroughbred with difficulty. "You were keeping curious company just now; do I disturb you?"

"In a measure, yes," answered the old man, stiffening as if a cold wind from the east had blown on him; "in a measure you do disturb me, Mr. Bancroft, for I was talking to a scapegrace and bidding him mend his ways."

Bancroft had his own view of the intimacy between the Squire and Tim o' Tab's—a view which half the parish shared—and a faint light of mockery crossed his face.

"The lesson was much needed, sir," he answered smoothly. "If you had bidden him keep clear of my own lands, it would not have been amiss. Game is scarcer at the Heights, I suspect, than it would be if Tim lived farther off. Some day I look to catch him at it, and—"

"The topic is distasteful, Mr. Bancroft," interposed the other coldly. "I ride for home—your way, I think, lies otherwise?"

Bancroft wheeled his horse about, with easy disregard of the Squire's aloofness.

"My way is yours, sir, if you'll have it so," he said.

The Squire inclined his head, with little goodwill in his acquiescence, and they rode up the hill in silence.

"How is little Barbara? It is a week and a day since I caught even a passing glimpse of her," said Bancroft presently.

"Barbara?" echoed the other, lifting his brows. "She would scarcely give you the right, I fancy, Mr. Bancroft, to call her by that name."

A certain coarseness in the grain served Bancroft well this morning, so far as following his purpose went. Another man would have found the moment unpropitious, for the Squire was over gentle and over courteous to whip the least of his acquaintance with his tongue unless some strong dislike or personal trouble had frayed his temper for the moment. Bancroft, however, saw only that the Squire's words had given him an opening.

"I want her to give me the right, sir," he answered quickly; "and it was to talk of this I turned back with you just now."

The Squire reined in, and sat there, quiet in the saddle, and looked Bancroft through and through. He had expected some such avowal any time these six months past; but this morning he had not looked for it, and it came too swiftly on the heels of late disquiet.

The same strained look was on his face as had been there when he talked with Tim o' Tab's in Water Lane; and Bancroft, waiting for his answer, could make nothing of the mixture of welcome and distaste with which the Squire seemed to be regarding his proposal.

"I—I cannot tell," muttered the old man at last. "This comes very suddenly, Mr. Bancroft, and my daughter is dearer to me than you can guess. You must allow me leisure, sir; you must let me weigh the matter fairly."

"Is my fortune too little, Squire?" broke in the other. It had seemed to him until now that he was doing honour to little Barbara by asking for her hand, and it nettled him to find his overtures so cavalierly met.

"Your fortune leaves nothing to be desired," answered the Squire, with an irony so subtle in his tone that it seemed directed as much against himself as against this well-favoured ruffler with his boisterous, half-bred air. "Your fortune leaves nothing, sir, to be desired," he repeated; "but Barbara is not to be measured by a price."

"Yet even Barbara cannot go lacking all the things that money buys; she will need food and raiment, Squire, and a house above her head. That was why I named my fortune."

Another change came over the Squire's face. "True," he murmured, "true, she will need all these things." Then, after a pause, "Mr. Bancroft, I cannot answer you just yet. Barbara is young, and her fancy over light to brook hard driving."

"And I am nearing thirty, Squire, and my fancy wants to settle," retorted Bancroft brusquely. "The lands are there, and love will follow in good time if you will trust her to my keeping."

"Your lands?" cried the Squire, with another flash of spleen that bore witness to the tenseness of his humour. "You take the longest road to my favour, Mr. Bancroft, when you bring your beggarly lands to plead for you. Am I a pauper, think ye, that the maid need go begging for a home?"

Bancroft might have learned much from the Squire's face, had he been skilled to read it—might have seen the war of many passions with much prudence, and under all a depth of self-disdain and soul-sickness that was tragic in its hopelessness. But Bancroft of the Heights was busy with his own hard calculations; Barbara would be no pauper, nor would he in that case have been asking for her hand upon this upland road; and while he measured Barbara's beauty and the fortune in one balance, and told himself he must speak this proud old man more softly, the Squire, too, was bethinking him of prudence.

"We must not quarrel, sir," said the younger man, more smoothly. "I will give my lands to the next beggar by the wayside if they stand between myself and Barbara."

"Tut, tut! A young man's folly. No, Mr. Bancroft, you shall keep your lands,"—the other winced a little,—"and you shall come to me, say, in a month's time, and hear my answer. And now, good-day to you; I would not take you past your turning."

Bancroft halted a moment, as if inclined for further speech, then lifted his beaver and struck off into the lane on the right hand that led him to the Heights. And after he was gone a change complete and pitiable came over old Squire Cunliffe.

"I dared not let the chance go by," he groaned. "Yet how will little Barbara take it? I have watched her grow—she was no higher than the summer corn when first I taught her to take pride in being a Cunliffe. Pride? Ay, and will she stoop to such as Bancroft of the Heights?"

He looked back toward Water Lane, and thought of how he had seen Tim o' Tab's with his wool-pack over his shoulders. "You know, Tim," he muttered, "you know how grievous hard for me it is!"

Tim, however, for all his ready sympathy with the Squire, was not thinking of any man's troubles at the moment; for he had crossed the yard of Smithbank Farm and had surprised this warm and merry April in her most playful mood. Hazel Beck had watered many kinds of landscape in its course; it had known the barren peat, and the wind-whistling wastes where the sky is bigger than the land; it had wandered through the shade of Hazel Dene, where the sky was almost hid, and every patch of moss or greensward was important in its littleness; and now it was free to the air again, save for the catkined alders on its banks, and here and there a sapling ash or smooth-bowled rowan-tree. From Ling Crag village to the stream round pastures sloped, with a steep and narrow cause-

way showing grey against the cropped green grass; beyond, the fields swelled up until the edge of Marshcotes Moor reached down its ragged fingers to snatch his hard-won acres from the husbandman; there was a little bridge across the stream, and fair in the sheltered hollow on the far side lay a cottage, square-built and lichened as the mistal that flanked its northern end. Deep sunlight and deep peace filled up the valley to its brim, and the farther farmsteads on the slope seemed kindly guardians of this cottage in the hollow; and bees were sleepy all about the hives that topped the tiny garden.

"It's a lovesome spot, choose who hears me say't," murmured Tim o' Tab's, as his dog and he stepped pratly down the causeway toward the stream. "An' a lovesome lass, if iver I set een on one," he added, as he caught a glimpse of white drapery between the leaves below.

She was seated under the alder-tree beside the bridge, and she was singing as she plied her wheel. A buxom lassie, with a look of the wind in her plump cheeks, and a look of teeming spring in all her round young body. Her arms, her neck, and all that showed beneath the folds of her white stomacher, were brown and wholesome, and under the dark lashes a pair of darker eyes looked out upon a world of which they had no fear.

> "Shame that lasses mun go lacking,
> While the daft lads chew their straws,"

she was singing, and the hum of her father's loom from the open upper window of the cottage added its own low and soothing burden to her song.

The voice was wayward and untutored, but it had the blackbird's mellow rush of life in it—the note that tingles through a hawthorn-brake in spring with its own full flood of passion. Tim heard the song soon as he came to the hill-crest up above, and he moved more jauntily beneath his load of wool.

"Shame that lasses mun go lacking," began the lassie once again, as she fixed a new thread to the distaff.

"Lacking what, Tabitha?" said Tim o' Tab's.

Tabitha Hirst turned with a start, and saw Tim's shrewd face twinkling at her from underneath his load of wool. "Nay, Tim, tha flaired me!" she cried. "I never heard thee—"

"Grass is gooid for a thief's foot," laughed Tim, disencumbering him of his wool-pack and standing on the far side of the stream. "What is't that th' lasses are all lacking so fearful sore? Happen I mud be of service like, for I am counted a handy chap."

"Lacking? A bit o' sense i' th' men-folk, to be sure. But that they'll niver get, if they bide a score of Christmases."

"Tha'rt right, Tabitha; for they'll allus run th' way a woman points, an' that war niver known to lead to owt but fooilishness."

"They say i' Ling Crag 'at Tim o' Tab's is a rare un to waste all folk's time, his own as weel. I'm thrang, Tim, if ye had een to see it wi'."

"Well, am I hindering thee, lass? It fair warms me like a drop o' liquor to see thy fingers wending in an' out so pratly. Dost know what browt me here this morn?"

"Idleness."

"Part, mebbe, an' part summat else. I seed th' little mistress a while back up i' th' Dene, an' she war full o' spring like till I spake o' Hazel Miln; an' I seed Maister Royd at after, an' he war full o' trade till I spake o' Mistress Barbara; an' so I put two an' two together, as th' saying is, an' reckoned there mun be summat atween 'em."

"I've guessed as mich long sin'," put in Tabitha, who, like all her sex, could not admit that gossip of such a kind was new to her. "I doan't see, either, why that should bring thee here."

"Well, it's catching, 'specially on such a warm-bellied day as this," said Tim light-heartedly. "It comes as natural to a man, does th' sight of a lass, wi' such spring weather, as cropping clover comes to sheep. Tha'rt bonnier nor most, Tabitha, an' tha hes th' same name as my mother hed, which is enough for a gooid son."

"Owt's enough for thee, when tha wants to do a bit o' laking," said Tabitha, glancing through long lashes at him. "If all th' lasses i' Ling Crag paid heed to all tha said, thy farm 'ud grow as mony missuses as it grows bents."

Tim o' Tab's grew thoughtful on the sudden, and turned toward the spot where he had last had speech of the old Squire; and then his glance returned to Tabitha, with a queer tenderness that seemed to be laughing at itself.

"One missus goes a far way," he said slowly—"a varry far way, so I'm telled, let alone a score on 'em.

But I niver told ony lass i' the moorside 'at she war half as gladsome to set een on as Tabitha Hirst."

"Looks is cheap," murmured Tabitha. "Ony lad could axe me for a look an' be sure o' getting it."

Tim o' Tab's was never less than wideawake to opportunities. He crossed the stream-way nimbly and put an arm about the lassie's waist, upsetting the spinning-wheel in his haste to take her warm mood flying. He freed her by and by, but not until he had claimed what few men in Ling Crag could ask with any surety of gaining. And then they looked each at the other, with laughter in their eyes and something of the spring's own devilry.

"For shame!" said Tabitha, stooping to pick up her wheel,—"For shame," she repeated by and by, in a still blither voice.

"It war natur'," Tim o' Tab's observed; "an' there's no wench so set on her way as natur'."

"My kisses are my own, I'd hev ye knaw."

"Tasting's believing, Tabitha; an' whether they be yourn or mine, I'll answer for't they're sweet."

A retort was on her lips, but it was checked by the sight of a big-bodied fellow who came round the corner of the cottage."

"Billy Puff, begow!" murmured Tim, with a droll wink.

Billy Puff was the parish constable, and as he waddled toward the bridge he oozed importance from every easily opened pore, as befitted one who had His Majesty's Peace in keeping; and when he saw his old enemy Tim, he puffed his cheeks out still more vigor-

ously, in the fashion that had earned him his name. For Tim, in his eyes, represented all that was most lawless in the parish, with a nimble wit, moreover, to back his lawlessness.

"Tabitha," Tim whispered behind his hand, "dost knaw Billy Puff talks up an' dahn an' says he thinks o' wedding thee?"

Tabitha tossed her head, and shot a wrathful glance at the advancing constable.

"He says he's noan just sure about it yet," went on the other; "he reckons he'll bide, Tabitha, seeing 'at there's no lass for a league around but wants him; I've heard him say myseln 'at it's hard for a man to choose when ivery cap is set at him."

Billy Puff was nearing the bridge by this time, his usual stilted gait softened to a would-be airiness, and his red face full of pompous gallantry.

"A fair day, Tabitha, an' warm for th' time o' year," he began in a voice that matched his figure.

The weather was a never-failing topic with Billy Puff; but he did not understand that one man may talk of spring and find his way to a maid's heart, while another makes little headway with speech of wind and sky.

"Ay, it's warm, if the look o' thy face be owt to go by," assented Tabitha, bending over her wheel with new-found earnestness.

"Well, mebbe I am what ye'd call a fresh-complexioned man," said Billy apprehensively. "'Tis not ivery one—Lord be thanked for't—as can show sich a sapless, benty-coloured skin as Tim o' Tab's."

"That's so," put in Tim, with a grave air; "it's not ivery one—Lord be thanked for't—who looks to die of apoplexy i' his latter end."

The constable turned a shade paler, for he was sensitive to any hint of bodily infirmity, as fat and pompous men are wont to be; and Tabitha, as women on their side are wont to be, had a keen eye for a man's weaknesses.

"I've feared for ye mony a time," she said, looking up from her wheel with make-believe solicitude. "There war Jabez Ramsbottom, now, o' Slithery Ford—he had mich o' thy fresh complexion, Billy, an' walked like thee, wi' a slow-sure sort o' step; an' he died i' pain, did Jabez."

Billy Puff took out a red-and-yellow handkerchief from the tail of his wide-bottomed coat, and wiped his brow. "Died i' pain, did he?" he murmured faintly.

Tabitha's solicitude increased. "Ay, he tore th' blankets into little strips, they say, he war that far gone wi' pain; an' Jonathan Scull—he war a bone-setter ower Bradford way—said as how he'd emptied ower mony ale-pots i' his time, an' weel-fleshed men could niver stand up long agen an ale-pot."

The constable was fond of his glass, and Tabitha grew outwardly more tender toward him, and inwardly more filled with laughter, as she watched from the corner of her eyes how he was taking this.

"I remember Jabez Ramsbottom; he war a full-fleshed chap an' a likely—same as Billy here—till th' flesh grew ower big an' swallowed him," said Tim o' Tab's, with a long sigh.

"I've not felt ower weel lately," murmured the constable, moving restlessly from foot to foot; "I'm taken that short i' th' wind ye wodn't believe when I've getten to clamber up a hill. He died i' grievous pain, ye say?"

"Ay," assented Tim, looking sadly at his dog; "an' he war fearful set on wedlock, too, war Jabez. I mind he talked big all up an dahn Ling Crag—it war th' varry week afore he died—how he could hev ony lass i' th' parish to wife if he could nobbut mak up his mind which to choose."

Billy Puff was a slow man, but he doubted Tim at all times, and something in his barefaced repetition of certain boastful utterances of his own moved the constable to look under the surface of all this doleful talk.

"Tha'rt right, Tim," put in Tabitha; "he hed thoughts o' wedding me, hed Jabez, once he war sartin-sure I suited him. But he war niver one to choose i' a hurry, when ivery cap on th' moorside war set at him."

The constable, awake now to the fact that he had been "trailed," puffed out his cheeks like smithy-bellows. "We've fallen on queer times, I'm thinking," he said, with loud breaths between his words. "His Majesty's law is nowt, seemingly, i' Marshcotes parish."

"Well, it isn't mich, if ye come to think on't," assented Tim cheerily. "There's nobbut thee i' all th' moorside knaws what th' law is, Billy."

"*Tha'll* knaw it by and by," snapped Billy. "I've hed my een on thee, Tim o' Tab's, mony a month, an'

I warn thee to mend thy ways for fear of His Majesty's displeasure. It's fearful like treason to trail a constable o' th' peace—ay, an' I knew a man be transported for life for less nor that."

"Begow, we're in for't then, Flick lass!" said Tim, glancing at the terrier with mock apprehension.

"Ye will be in for't one day, an' I give ye fair warning," said the constable, thrusting out his lower man as if to emphasise his bulk. "Bide till I cotch thee at thy games, Tim o' Tab's, an' I'll learn ye what folk get for trailing Billy Puff."

"Nay, Billy, I'm nobbut a little un," pleaded the rascal. "Tha shouldn't flair me so."

"I'll wish thee gooid-day, Tabitha, an' likelier company," said the constable, disdaining any direct response to Tim o' Tab's. "There's niver ony mak o' gooid i' one-eyed men, Tabitha, for they're all blind on th' side where th' road points to law an' godliness."

"I've knawn folk wi' one eye see more nor Billy Puff can see wi' two. It's all th' way ye use what ye've getten, as th' poacher said when he nobbled keeper Jim wi' the end of a blackthorn stick."

"Now, doan't go Billy!" struck in Tabitha. "Ling Crag is full o' wenches ready to set their caps at ye, an' it's noan safe for a bonnie lad like thee."

"Tha'll be catched, Billy, sure as iver they set een on thee. I wodn't go, not I, if I war a handsome chap like Billy Puff."

The constable was already retreating up the stream, blowing as he went; and Tabitha and Tim laughed softly one to another at the likeness between Billy's gait

and the self-important waddling of a drake who knows the ducks are watching him.

"We trailed owd Billy, an' proper. He's heavy i' th' wind an' th' wit, is Billy," Tim cried.

"I'm feared he'll mak it warm for thee, all th' same, once he gets a chance," said Tabitha, a shade of apprehension in her face.

"Ay, but he'll hev to catch me first, an' that'll not be this side of a June Christmas, I'm thinking. No need to axe where thy father is, Tabitha," he broke off, glancing at the upper window of the cottage, from which the bustling music of the loom still sounded; "I could tell th' way Jonathan throws his shuttle from a score of others—there's a ring an' a crispness wi' th' sound on't."

"Ay, father's up i' th' chamber, weaving. An' mother's goan to buy a pig off Jacob o' Stouprise Farm. So I'm by myseln, Tim, i' a way o' speaking," said Tabitha, with a roguish, sidelong look at him.

"It's a varry gooid place for thy father, is th' chamber," murmured Tim, "for he'd skift me fine an' sharp if he knew 'at I war here. He's noan best pleased to see me here at ony time, isn't Jonathan Hirst."

"He's ower thrang by habit, an' busy folk doan't seem to tak to ye, I've noticed," answered Tabitha, with a soft laugh. "Besides I'm spinning yarn for him, an' he'll need it by an' by, for he weaves at a flairsome speed."

Tim was silent for awhile, watching the girl's fingers moving to and fro amongst the sunlit strands of wool. "Times is changing, Tabitha, an' not for th' better,"

he said, stretching himself lazily beside his terrier and hearkening to the threefold music of the labourers,—the hum of Tabitha's wheel and hum of the untiring loom, and hum of the honey-gathering bees.

"How so? Times is mich as they war, I reckon—buckets o' rain, an' a bit o' sunshine now an' again."

"Nay, they're worsening. Th' milns hev come into Ling Crag, an' sooin tha'll hev to wark betwixt four walls, 'stead of sitting at thy doorstun."

Tabitha's face flushed a dusky red; for there was more than honest labour implied by working in a mill. "I'll thank thee to talk i' a more seemly fashion," she flashed. "Tha's as good as said I should be a factory-hand one day, Tim o' Tab's, an' I'd sooiner drown i' th' beck yonder."

"Soft, now, lass! Ther's them i' th' parish—one on 'em's talking to ye—'at 'ud niver let that come to ye."

"My father wodn't, for one," she retorted, her anger unappeased by Tim's soft suggestion. "We can addle a living an' plenty to spare, thank ye, without miln-walls about us."

"Well, I hope as mich, lass, though there's talk o' power-looms as weel as spinning-jennies; an' th' Lord knows what'll come to us all when th' master-weavers get all our women-folk."

"They shallun't!" cried Tabitha fiercely. "There war sin an' there war sorrow enow i' Ling Crag afore iver a master-weaver came; but they've made bad war, an.'—"

"But there's Maister Royd, now," put in Tim. "He can hev a wench to wark for him, an' let her be."

A smile broke through the lassie's frowns; young blood and spring together would not let her see the dark side too long. "Ay, for Maister Royd is like a stalk o' ling wi' th' frost on't;" she cried—"ower stiff for marlaking wi', an' if he bends he breaks i' two. That's th' way on't, Tim; ye men are all one way or t'other—awther so hard it makes us shiver just to look at ye, or so flairsome hot ye burn a body. I could wish, time an' time, that Maister Royd war warmer like when he saw a snod lass tripping by him; 'twould do him gooid."

"Well, ye can't say I'm lacking that way, choose what," put in Tim heartily. "I'm warm as lighted peats where I've a right to be warm—an' that's wi' thee, Tabitha."

"Tha's getten no right," murmured Tabitha, disentangling a knot from her skein. "'Tis nawther axed nor gi'en, Tim o' Tab's."

Tim got to his feet, and all his certainty that he could never, for Squire Cunliffe's sake, be wed, vanished in a sudden resolve. She was so tempting, with the sun in her black hair and the shadow on her half-averted face. His purpose was forestalled, however, for a rough head was thrust from the upstairs window of the cottage, and a rough voice rang down to the hollow of the streamway—

"Tim o' Tab's, ye raffle-coppin, what th' dangment do ye want wi' Tabitha?"

Tim tried to look dismayed as he glanced up. "Nay, I wanted nowt, Jonathan, save to see if I could help her spin a bit," he said.

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"*Thee* help? As weel axe th' wind to come an' sit at th' spindle. Tabitha, is yond weft ready? tha mun-not keep me waiting."

"Flick lass, we'll be wending," murmured Tim. "There's a time for all things, an' it's time for flitting now. I'll come to th' garden-top to-neet, Tabitha," he whispered, as he crossed the bridge. "I'd weel like to—"

"Like to what, Tim?"

"To hear if ye kept your father waiting for his weft, or no," he laughed, and struck up the fields just as Jonathan Hirst sent down his rough-edged bass again.

He walked briskly up toward Water Lane, and as he climbed the stile he told himself that maybe all was for the best; if old Jonathan had not cut short his wooing, he might have been a promised man by this time, with the double burden of a sweetheart and a secret on his hands. He had scarce gone fifty yards before he met Mistress Barbara coming down the lane on her way from Marshcotes Parsonage.

"I'm i' a difficulty like, Mistress Barbara," said Tim.

"Then let me solve it for you," she said, smiling.

"Well, it's this way. Blood's blood, 'specially when it's hot; an' a lass is a lass; an' I'd be fain to wed, if only I could see my way to't."

"And why not, Tim? they say in Ling Crag that a wife would keep you soberer—and I think that perhaps they're right."

"Well, now, I wodn't be too sure o' that. She mud, or she mudn't, there's niver no telling. Howsiver I'd tak th' risk o' that, Mistress Barbara, if I nobbut dared."

"If you dared? I thought you brave, Tim."

"Ay, but it's noan just a matter o' myseln. I've getten a secret to keep; if 'twar my own I wodn't care, but it belangs another man, an' I'm bound, so to say, to look arter it more careful like."

Barbara had been regarding him with playful, friendly eyes; but she dropped them now, and plucked a sprig of thyme from the bank behind her, and rubbed it absently between her palms.

"My father's secret—is it not that you mean?" she faltered.

"Nay, now!" put in the other hurriedly; "I said a secret, but I niver said it war th' Squire's. What, mistress! There's part talk up an' dahn th' moorside, about black magic, an' th' Lord knaws what; but ye munnot pay no heed to't."

"How can I help, Tim, how can I help?" she broke in. "He works in the night hours, and keeps all knowledge from me of what his work may be. You know what he does; but his own daughter has to go sorrowing—sorrowing, and fearing, Tim, she knows not what."

"See ye, Mistress Barbara, I'm a rum un, an' that's gospel, but I niver lied to man nor woman, let alone to sich as ye. An' when I tell ye Squire knaws his own business best, when I tell ye he's right to wark as he does, an' right to keep it from ye—why I've a fancy ye'll believe me."

Barbara held the crushed thyme to her face for awhile, as if its fragrance pleased her. "So you wish to be married, Tim?" she said, with abrupt change of topic.

"I've a leaning that way, mistress. Ye'll knaw th' lass, an' all—Tabitha Hirst, an' her een as black as dog-berries."

"Yes, I'm fond of Tabitha. She would make you a good wife." Barbara's air was important, with the sweet importance of the girl who brings all her weight of inexperience to bear upon a weighty matter.

"There'd be war wives i' Ling Crag," assented Tim guardedly,—"but what o' th' secret? I'm single now, ye see, an' if a lass axes me owt I doan't want to tell her—why, there's th' kine to be tended, or a stone o' wool wants combing, or I've getten to see a chap ower Cranshaw way. But when ye're wed, there's no sich slippings off; she eats wi' ye', and lives wi' ye, an' th' back-end o' your mind is sure to peep out unawares sooin or late."

"Perhaps she would keep the secret, Tim," laughed Barbara.

Tim glanced at her with unaffected wonderment. "What, a wench? Nay, now, Mistress Barbara; as weel hod sand i' a sieve as gossip i' a wench's tongue."

Barbara looked at him in a puzzled fashion; it was hard to say at all times whether Tim were jesting, and yet this morning there was an undernote of earnestness in his banter.

"But, Tim, do you mean it?" she cried; "or is it just that Tabitha is not as willing as you would have her be?"

"Well, as to that, I war niver one to boast; but women's that contrairy, she mud hev me if I axed her —ay, I've a fancy she'd have me if I nobbut axed her."

"Then, Tim," said Barbara, nodding gravely at him as she started up the hill, "you had better ask her before she changes,—and—maybe she will keep the secret after all."

"Mebbe," growled Tim, after she was gone like a sun-ray up the steep of Water Lane. "It's easy for th' little mistress to look no further nor th' tip of her bonnie nose—but what 'ud Squire say? Poor Squire! It 'ud break his heart if th' parish got to knaw on't."

Yet Barbara was not thinking as lightly of the matter as Tim supposed; and while she thought his doubts were make-believe, and in part ridiculous, she could not rid her of the trouble that mention of her father's secret never failed to bring. What was it that the Squire did, night by night, up yonder in the eerie laithe?

But she found no better answer to that question now than she had done a score times before.

CHAPTER VI

THE MASTER OF GOIT MILL

THE Marshcotes farmers had all the outlook of their kind upon the weather, regarding it as in some sort a child of their own rearing, and dreading to spoil it by any approach to flattery or commendation; and so they had no praise for this spring that was breaking over moor and dingle, over steep pasture-fields and primrosed coppices, and pattering, fern-grown streams. Yet the younger men had seen no season like it, nor could their elders of four-score years remember more than one April that had stepped so firmly and so sweetly into May; and men like Parson Horrocks—who left the weather to itself, and were glad to be rid of such a tricky burden—looked out across the hills and owned that God had vouchsafed a very present miracle. The wildness was gone, the wet whimpering of the storm, the throb of tragedy; the waste was peopled, and where the ling had bent dishevelled branches to the peat, green buds were swelling, and grouse were busy with their yearly housewifery. Yet even the Parson could not find his wonted gladness in the spring; and if the evils of the new trade were troubling him, the difficulties of it were dulling Stephen Royd no less effectually to the fret of all green things.

Stephen Royd, no less than the farmers and the Parson, had opportunities of watching the warm progress of the season; for only the spinning of the yarn was done in Hazel Mill—not all of that, indeed—and there were hand-weavers, combers, spinners, each to be visited at their own cottages; there was the Thursday market to be attended at Bradford, the Saturday market at Halifax; he was perpetually in the saddle, perpetually in touch with the lone uplands that lay between himself and every place of business that he visited. No man in Ling Crag had a fairer chance of watching the warm progress of the season; yet it passed him by until the middle week of May.

For there was more than a hot summer brewing in this spring of 1825. Many of the mill-masters in the towns refused to believe what the clearer-sighted men saw only too plainly; the wool-combers had always been a grumbling set of folk, they said, and always would be, and their present discontent was not deep enough to force them into the risks and privations of a strike. But Royd, who took the trouble to go among the Bradford combers, to listen to their talk and gauge the temper of their discontent—Royd knew that a strike would come as surely as the potato-crop and the ingathering of the hay; and all his efforts during these long weeks of spring, while yet the cloud of disaster showed no bigger than a man's hand, were directed toward the safety of his own trade during the troublous time. There was no union of the master-weavers in Marshcotes and Ling Crag with those of the bigger towns; they were a race to themselves, trading in their

own fashion in the lonely cleft of moor that harboured them, and even in their own commonwealth they were not united, but fought each for himself, neither giving nor demanding help from one another. Had the question of honour stepped in, there would have been no man more handicapped by scruples than Stephen Royd, for gentility was still strong to clog his keener business instincts; but honour did not touch the question, and he saw that he might lift his fortunes clear into the affluence he craved if only he could keep his combers busy while the looms of other masters stood unfed and idle. He had always paid better wages than the majority of his fellows; he meant to go on paying them, and neither on the one hand to flatter the combers into hopes of weakness by an advance, nor on the other to reduce them at the dictate of a false economy so long as he had money in hand to invest against the coming of a better day.

And for this he was working—working obstinately during every moment he could snatch from the usual round of business. He would not wait until disquiet grew big about the moorside; he grasped the evil now, while it was weak, and wrestled with it. Nor was the task an easy one; it needed endless patience, never-resting tact, and only the fact that he was bone and blood of the same race as the skew-tempered folk whom he employed, enabled him to get beneath their guard. To keep a high hand, and yet to reason with them; to carry the matter with the strong man's wilfulness they liked, and yet to avoid the tyranny that touched them on the raw—this was the master-weaver's task; and

the difficulty of it roused him, for it was battle of a sturdy sort.

Old Jasper Royd, who had drunk and made merry at the Heights so long as there was a guinea to be spent, would have laughed in his own boisterous fashion could he have seen his son this afternoon as he came riding toward the old homestead on his way from Colne. This grave, unsmiling man, every line of whose face betrayed long self-restraint working to a sure end,—he had been a lad when Jasper died, a lad whose heart was eager toward the things accounted worthy by the Royds. Wherever a hound gave tongue about the moorside, or a snipe flashed low to the gunshot, there would old Jasper and young Stephen be surely found; and father and son had galloped together, good comrades and fast friends, to the last inch of tether. That was long ago, however; and between then and now there lay a score years of quiet slumber on the father's part, a score years of lonely effort on the son's; and old Jasper, had he stood, quick and devil-me-care as on the day he died, and watched his son's face now, and read his thoughts of yarn and worsted cloth, of strikes and markets and hard bargains—old Jasper might well have asked if this were really his lad Stephen, if he were indeed a Royd at all.

Yet he was a Royd to the heart of him, and even as he passed the boundary-wall of the Heights land this afternoon his bearing changed. It seemed as if a mask had fallen from him, and under the hard outline of the face a live and glowing passion showed itself. Through all the years that had gone since he went out for the

last time from the garden-gate below, the sight of the old home had never once failed to kindle fire within him; whether he saw it dimly from across the valley, as on the night when he had talked with Parson Horrocks, or whether he checked his horse, as now, within touch and smell of the remembered acres, the same rush of feeling mastered him. It was the poetry of his life, and it had kept ambition wholesome throughout the long Ishmaelitish years when he had struggled, his hand against every man's, to build up a fortune from his trade.

To-day the mood was stronger on him than its wont. The pastures looked so kindly under the slant rays that marked them with straight lanes of light and softest shadow; the oats were blading with such cool wealth of green farther down toward the valley; and close at hand, in the field next the roadway at which he checked his horse, a ruddy farm lad was setting seed potatoes down the long sandy furrows. It was this last touch, usual and homely as it was, that brought the past back clear as yesterday to him; for in the year which had been marked black by family ruin, and blacker by old Jasper's death, his last bit of husbandry had been learned in this same field, which then, as now, had been sown for the potato-crop,—and the man remembered, with a strange distinctness, how grudgingly the lad had taken to his farming lesson until the old farm-hand had laughed so at his clumsiness that his pride had been touched, and when the day ended he had learned to set a furrow with the best.

All this came back to Stephen Royd, as he sat in the

saddle and looked over the stone fence at the farm-boy's work, and with it a hot thrill of protest against the life he was shaping for himself. Again he hated the trade that made him rich, and loved the land for lack of which he felt himself a beggar. Again he heard the horns go echoing up the Dene on a winter's hunting-morn, and watched the kine come heavy-uddered to the mistal, and rode, with the jolliest father that ever made a comrade of a son, to a poacher's wassail-night, a cock-fight, or a harvesting. He had begun life young, and it seemed to Royd, as his mind went swinging down the past, that all he had ever learned worth the knowing had been taught him before he reached sixteen; the rest was meaningless, unlovely, and twenty years had been cancelled for the moment by the sight of one careless farm-lad stooping down the furrows.

His eyes were resting on the scene before him all this while; he saw the long furrows striding over the round crest of the field, and the rich-smelling effluent of the mistals that lay thick all down the troughs; he saw the grey-brown lines of potatoes, and on the nearer ones he marked how bravely they were shooting out their suckers; he marked the crumbling, wholesome brown of the soil which had been thrice ploughed, he guessed, to bring it to such kindliness. The farm-dog, too, guarding the potato-sacks that lay beside the gate, —its face, with the look of extreme and jealous watchfulness upon it, might well have belonged to the dog which twenty years ago had watched him take his first lesson in potato planting; and all the while there was the rythmic movement of the farm-lad as he strode

down the furrows, stooping at every step to plant his root-seed in its place; and all the while there was the carol of a lark above, and far off across the moor the wail of a marsh-haunting curlew. Song of the lark that voiced work's wholesomeness, and cry of the curlew that mourned the weariness of labour—the double note struck strangely on Royd's ear this morning, for they were the music to which all his lang-syne life had been attuned.

The farm-lad had done his sowing now, and a second yokel had come up the field with a led cart-horse, which he was already yoking to the plough. Still Royd tarried, while they drove the plough once up and down again by the same route, between the lines of the potatoes. There was no detail but came to him with a fresh charm, for it was like meeting with a friend whose intimacy had been long laid aside by absence. The care that was needed to keep the horse from trampling on the seed, and the consequent difficulty of guiding the plough-blade straight; the fall of earth upon the seed, and the little rill that was left down the middle of each completed rigg. Men notice little things at such times, and by and by Royd smiled as his keen eye followed the boys' movements.

"Say, lads, who taught you farming?" he called, with instinctive readiness to put a detail of wrong practice right.

The boy who held the plough looked up at the end of his furrow and straightened his back slowly, and spat upon his hands. "Nay, I war born to't," he said

gravely, and stooped again to the plough as if the matter were thrashed out in full.

"Oh, you were born to it?" laughed Royd. "Well, listen to me, and you'll be wiser than you were at daybreak. You are driving as crooked a furrow as ever I set eyes on."

The lad went on with the business of turning round the plough, and it seemed he was either deaf or surly, until he lifted his head and showed the marks of earnest thought on his wide face.

"Seems to me, Maister Royd," he said, "as ye doan't learn i' Hazel Miln to plant taties; it's noan likely, if ye come to think on't."

"No, but I can tell a crooked furrow when I see it—and those riggs of yours are as winding as the road to Colne."

"Happen you's like to show me th' way on't?" broke in the lad. His face was grave as ever, but a faint glitter in his eyes told that he looked to clinch the argument by this direct appeal.

For answer Royd swung himself from the saddle, tied the bridle to the gate, and crossed to where the farm-lads stood and gaped at him.

Down and up he went, encouraging the lazy farm-horse all the while to greater speed; and when he stopped at the end of the furrow, the sweat was running down his face with an exertion to which he had been little used of late. It was done as he did everything—quickly, neatly, with the surety of one who knows the tool he handles.

"Begow, but ye frame!" cried the lad. "If I war to plough at that flairsome speed, maister, I'd be dead as Parson's cat come neetfall. So you've done part farming, like?"

Royd was wiping his forehead, and naming himself fool to have followed such a whim. He made no answer, but turned sharply toward the gate, on the far side of which his horse was fretting with impatience; and as he did so, he saw two heads above the boundary wall—the one close-cropped and shaded by a beaver, the other small and shapely, with soft hair gathered up beneath a feathered, broad-brimmed hat. And little Barbara was smiling with frank enjoyment of a scene which showed grave Stephen Royd at play.

"A fair day for tilling land, Mr. Royd," came Bancroft's voice, cool, thin, and full of irony. "Shall I thank you for the work you've done for me, or rebuke you for a trespass?"

"You may do both, Mr. Bancroft, if it pleases you; but at the least your folk will know a little more of ploughing than they did."

Royd's glance did not stay long with Bancroft, but rested for a moment on little Barbara; and she, soon as she caught the glance, grew grave upon the sudden and turned away her head. Partly it vexed her that Stephen should be found trespassing on the lands of such a man as Bancroft, and partly she remembered what a night long ago had taught her—remembered the sweetness and the shame of it, and the need there was to keep at arm's length her friend of other days.

It was the first time they had seen each other since she had sung to him in the fragrant Wynyates parlour, and she had shrunk from such a meeting. But Royd, not knowing this, saw only that she turned from him; and he found his own reasons for it.

Bancroft of the Heights, meanwhile, was making the most of his opportunity according to his lights. "My folk will know more of ploughing, will they?" he went on in the same tone, while he stroked his horse's ears with the end of his whip. "It is kind of you, Mr. Royd, to give them a much needed lesson; for my part, I leave the ploughshare to my hinds—but tastes differ, it would seem."

"Yes, I come of an old-fashioned stock," answered Royd, with a quiet mastery of himself that ruffled Bancroft of the Heights. "I was taught that the man who leaves his land to take care of itself is apt to find it slip away from him." A flush of disquiet crossed Bancroft's face, but the other did not see it. "That was long ago, however," he went on, unslipping his bridle from the gate and getting to saddle—"before your father, Mr. Bancroft, purchased any land at all, I think."

Barbara frowned as she bowed a light farewell to Royd; she did not care to see him use his adversary's own crude weapons. Bancroft of the Heights, for his part, was well content that she had shown herself so cold to the mill-master; for he had little doubt of the Squire's answer to his suit, and meanwhile he was paying a half-veiled and assiduous court to Barbara.

This morning his wooing was of a speedier sort; and Barbara, who had had no inkling until now that he was in any sense a lover, drew back instinctively from the new tone in his voice and the new boldness in his glance. She answered little to his rattle-pated talk, and when they reached the foot of Wynyates bridle-track, she turned to him—

"I will not take you farther out of your road, Mr. Bancroft," she said coldly.

"The little wench is coy," laughed Bancroft to himself. "Your road is mine to-day," he said, bowing with a certain loose-built grace of which he was a master, "and the bridle-track that leads to Wynyates is the fairest in the country, so I think."

Again Barbara fell into silence as they went up the road. She had hoped, by ridding her of Bancroft's company before they reached the gate, to avoid the need of offering hospitality; and when they had drawn rein and Bancroft eagerly came forward to help her to alight, she would not accept his aid, but dismounted at the horsing-steps.

"You will stay for a glass of wine?" she murmured, standing with the bridle in her hand.

"Just for one glass, and for a word with Squire Cunliffe," he said, and smacked his booted leg with high good-humour as he followed her indoors and marked the lissom beauty of her figure.

The Squire was coming in by the side-door leading from the mistal-yard; the sweat, scanty and beaded, was standing on his forehead, and soon as he saw Bancroft in the dim light of the passage, he glanced

with sudden disquiet at his hands and put them well behind his back with the characteristic action which puzzled all his friends.

"I am glad to see you here, Mr. Bancroft—very glad to see you here," he said, in his stately way. "You will pardon me if I do not offer you my hand,—I—I have been working among my chemicals and I should soil your glove, I fear."

Barbara sighed. Too often, by night and day, the Squire had been working in his laboratory since Tim o' Tab's came to free him from enforced idleness; and too often he returned, as now, with exhaustion and utter weariness writ plain upon his face.

"Mr. Bancroft will take a glass of wine, father," she said, coming close to him and looking into his face with the anxious look—half childish, half motherly—that had grown to be second nature to her. "He met me on the road, and was kind enough to bring me home."

He patted the hand she laid upon his sleeve, and Bancroft noticed that he left a slight stain, oily and yellowish, upon the girl's smooth skin.

"Mr. Bancroft is very welcome, Barbara. So you have enjoyed your ride, child? Well, it is good to see the summer in your cheek; but you mustn't go too far from home—the roads are lonely for one unattended."

She did not pursue the topic; indeed, she had always chafed at the need for having a man-servant ride with her, and now that the Squire, for some reason unexplained, had lessened the number of his servants by one half, it was a relief to her that she must ride alone.

The Squire led his visitor into the parlour, and Bancroft, turning from a long draught of wine, was vexed for the moment to find that Barbara had slipped away.

"As you say, sir, the roads are lonely hereabouts. I was surprised to find your daughter galloping down by Dead Lad's Rigg," said the younger man.

The other bit his lip, and checked his first impulse to resent such free-spoken criticism. "There are but the two of us here," he said after a pause, "but two of us, Mr. Bancroft, and it seemed a folly to keep more servants about us than we needed." There was a curious shiftlessness about his manner that was almost deprecation; but the pride would not be held back for long. "My daughter can ride fearlessly about the moor," he added; "she is a Cunliffe of Wynyates, sir, and all the moorside knows her."

"And all the moorside loves her, Squire," put in Bancroft, changing front. "Am I any nearer to prospering in my suit?"

"Put it away from you as yet—put it away from you," cried the Squire peevishly. "You have had my answer, sir, that you shall dine with us on the fifteenth of the month—my daughter's birthday—and hear my answer."

Bancroft's face darkened, then cleared again. "So be it," he said. "A fortnight's suspense seems years to a man far gone in love—but then I'm young, sir, and all that is folly to the old."

"Folly?" echoed the Squire, searching the other's face. "True love is never folly—true love—but true love is rare, Mr. Bancroft, not to be confounded with

any sudden fever of the blood. What, must you go already?"

"I fear so, sir. My lawyer comes to the Heights this afternoon, and, being a busy man, he does not like to be kept waiting."

"Then farewell, and a good journey to you. It would be well, I think—I say it in all kindness—that you should see little of my daughter until a fortnight hence."

The half-rebuke slipped off from Bancroft lightly, and he rode down the hill in high spirits. It was the Squire's whim, he thought, to try his patience; it was the Squire's intention, he was certain, to accept his suit; and first he thought of Barbara, and hungered for her beauty after the manner of his love; and then he turned for a look at grey old Wynyates, with its score suggestions of opulence and ease.

"Worth the winning, both of them," he said softly. "True, the father is a madman; but 'tis lucky that his madness takes the form of parsimony. He thinks himself poor, if I mistake not—it is a foible of rich dotards, so I'm told—and so he slaves at finding the Philosopher's Stone, and halves the number of his servants, and grudge Barbara a man-servant to ride with her. Damme, he is well employed; if he had taken to wine and high living now, instead of saving, I might have cried out; as it is, he's saving all for Barbara—and me."

His face fell, however, as he neared the Heights, and saw a full-fleshed horseman, in a suit of well-brushed black, dismounting at his gate. For the sleek stranger,

with the big mouth that seemed to be always murmuring "Give, give," and the two rows of flesh beneath the chin that told of much high-feeding, was no other than Lawyer Fairchild of Saxilton, and he had come to talk over a piece of business that was little to his client's liking.

"I must marry little Barbara; there's no help for it, he muttered, as he spurred forward to the gate.

His uneasiness might have been still more marked had he guessed how unconsciously yet how clearly Royd's thoughts were bearing at the moment on the object of the lawyer's visit. The mill-master, soon as he had left Barbara and her companion at the corner of the potato-field, had taken the track that left his mill below him on the right; he had a four-mile journey yet to make, and all the way his mind was tangled in the memories of old days and new. First, he recalled Barbara's averted face, and read in it the death-warrant of their old companionship; and then, for the first time in his life of gravely ordered effort, a shaft of jealousy pierced him unawares. This Bancroft, smooth and debonair, who rode with her as if by right—was he like to prove a successful rival? Stephen Royd smiled faintly as he thought of Bancroft's rivalry; but the shaft had struck for all that, and the clean wound it gave was healthy for such a man as Royd. Heretofore he disdained Bancroft of the Heights, accounting him, as all the moor-folk did, too slight a man to be considered gravely; but now it grew plain to him upon the sudden that he would begin by and by to hate this rough-bred ruffler.

He wearied of the topic soon, however, and laughed outright at the memory of how not long since he had paused in the midst of worsted manufacture to plough a furrow. He wondered that the trick of it should have lain unforgotten all these years; then he remembered why he had been forced as a lad to learn all the ways of seed-time and of harvest, of tending kine and sheep-shearing. Old Jasper Royd had seen disaster coming on apace, and almost his last word to his son, before that final tragedy, which was to leave him not beggar only, but an orphan, had shown the purpose in his mind.

"You'll take a farm, lad, with the little money there'll be left," he had said; "and God be thanked that I fitted you to turn your hand to honest labour."

How carefully the father had planned, Royd thought, —he who had planned no other scrap of prudence in his life,—and yet how differently the son had chosen. To take a farm and to follow it was to live poor for all his days; he had needed the stimulus of a great prize to keep himself from sinking to the level of a hind, and he had found that stimulus in trade—trade, that was to win back the Heights for him. With the little money over he had bought, not a farm, but knowledge of the wool-business, and after that a little mill. The little mill was no bigger now than it had been; but every year he found more work for labourers outside, and every year he proved the wisdom of the step which he had taken. He was a rich man at last, and likely to be richer by the half before the year was out; he could buy back the Heights—if the Heights were only in the market.

The mill-master lifted his head upon the sudden, and opened his wide shoulders. That morning's halt to watch a bit of farm-work forward had kindled the land-love in him all afresh; he was awake to the sweetness of the wind, the warm compulsion of the sun upon the growing crops, the joy of winning meat and bread from nature instead of guineas from the greasy lap of trade. For years he had been sick to get back to land, but had not let the sickness master him; to-day he was ready to give up all for land—if he could buy back the Heights. He was riding, swift and straight, to clinch a bargain at Goit Mill, but the one thought only was in his mind —he was rich enough to leave bargaining behind for ever. Bancroft had sneered at him a while since; his face hardened as he thought of it.

" His father ousted mine without pity; and I will oust him if my time ever comes," he muttered. " I'll work and I'll watch—and Heaven help fool Bancroft if his paper floats into my safe."

The whole air of the man was changed as he rode into the yard of Goit Mill. He had found love not long ago; but the upland folk need more than love—they need a touch of rivalry, the sister-passion, to keep their outlook wholesome. And Stephen Royd, wrenched suddenly—against his will, almost—from the passion-less life he had been leading, was learning more in these spring months than a lifetime of the mills had taught him.

He dismounted in the mill-yard and looked about him with a distasteful shrug. In every detail, Goit Mill was different from his own. Instead of the trim garden,

green with its rows of beans and grey-green where the earliest potatoes pushed their spikes above the soil, there was an ugly waste of ground, covered thick with docks and nettles and refuse of the mill. No fruit-trees redeemed the high, bare walls; no beehives caught the sunlight on their thatch, suggesting the poetry of toil as they murmured in harmony with the spinning-frames within and the water-wheel without. The sun itself, which formed a hundred points of softness in Hazel Mill, could only emphasise the desolation here. It was the new type of mill; and Royd, as he looked about him in search of Ephraim Booth, its master, could hear the voice of the new trade come shrill and clear from behind the walls of Goit Mill. Above the thunder of the water-wheel, above the rattle of the score-and-three spinning-frames, there sounded every now and then the protest of the child-labourers against the overlooker's lash—a familiar note enough to Stephen Royd, but the one which had a new sharpness for his ear this morning.

"Where is your master?" he called, as a lad came round the corner of the mill with an armful of yarn.

"He's i' th' miln. Ye mud hev knawn as mich by th' screams," said the youngster, and passed on.

Royd went in at the door, and looked down the length of the bare room. There were none but children working here, yet among all the faces there was not one which showed any trace of childhood. The lass nearest to him was nodding at her work, and her hands were moving unconsciously from the floor to the box of the spinning-frame, from the

frame to the floor, though the pile of wool from which she had been feeding the machine was long since exhausted. Sleepy faces, dull and tearstained faces—all were here—but not one with any sort of playfulness, content, or hope in it. It was plain that these bairns had never played; that was the way Royd put it to himself as he marked their stunted bodies and weary eyes—and it seemed to him the saddest summing-up of a child's life that any man could find.

He remembered the child whom they had met, he and Parson Horrocks, as they rode from Wynyates two months ago, and looked about for her, wondering if she were still at work; he could not find her though, and his eyes fell instead upon Ephraim Booth, the master, who stood at the far end of the room with his eyes upon every frame at once. By his side was the overlooker, and Booth pointed out to him the lass, who, close to Royd, was nodding over her work of feeding the spinning-frame. The overlooker nodded; and as he passed down between the frames, swinging his whip as if he loved it, the children cowered and shrank like dogs who plead against their punishment. He was close beside the culprit now, but she was too far spent to notice him until the lash, had twice come down upon her shoulders.

"I'll waken thee, begow! I'll waken thee," the man shouted hoarsely. The phrase had grown to be his.

An ungovernable fury came on Royd, though he had watched many a scene like this and tricked himself into denying pity. He clutched the overseer's arm, and wrenched the whip from him, and broke the handle full

across his face. Then he picked up his own riding-whip, which he had dropped, and fell into a quiet as sudden as his passion and waited for the sequel. Before the overlooker had got the blood out from his eyes, however, Ephraim Booth had run down the room and stood between them. A type of the new trade, Ephraim Booth, and he bore the marks of it as surely as his mill-hands did. A wide, red face and a heavy jaw; small eyes, a fleshy nose. His children were to ride in their carriages one day, but meanwhile he had no time to polish himself against their future shame of him: rough and sharp as a lump of quartz, he forced his way in the world, unhindered by love or hate or pity; and money was the sole object of his worship.

"This is my miln, Maister Royd," he said, in a rough burr that was neither honest Yorkshire nor honest English; "if ye doan't like ye can quit it."

"That is so," Royd agreed; "but I neither like your mill nor am I going to quit it until I've asked you a question or two. Why do you keep this brute with the whip? Why do you tempt the moor-folk to drop a lump of rock on you some night when you come up the Dene?"

"Did ye come to drive a bargain with me, or no? I've no time to hearken to fooil's talk," snapped the other, after a pause of surprise.

Royd saw on the sudden how useless it was to talk of anything but money with such as Ephraim Booth; the children would pay the reckoning for his late outburst; he had half-blinded a man who had but done his master's bidding; that was all he had gained by his

interference. He had meant to say more to this red-faced man with the small eyes, had meant to cry out upon him with generous warmth; but sentiment was folly once a man had set his hand to the plough of trade, and Stephen Royd laughed bitterly at his own want of wit. He was the business man, again, come to buy a hundredweight of yarn; and with the shrewdness which none of his fellow-masters had fully gauged, he knew that Booth expected to make a good bargain with him, or he would never have passed over so quietly Royd's treatment of the overlooker. Knowing this, he named a price lower by one-tenth than he had purposed. Booth declined his offer, bidding him go back to Hazel Mill if his pockets were no better lined—then recalling him and suggesting they should meet half-way—all in the stereotyped, blunt fashion of bartering that was familiar to Ling Crag commerce. The bargain clinched at last, Booth walked slowly across the yard with his customer and looked at him with the red lids lowered over his small eyes.

"Now th' brass is addled, we can talk," he said; "an' I'll give ye a word i' time, Royd o' Hazel Miln. Ye're ower softly-born and softly-bred for trade."

"Yet I make money time and time," answered Royd, with the immovable face that was said to have earned him many a hundred pounds in bargaining.

"Ye mak brass?" cried the other, thrusting his thumbs into his arm-holes and staring impudently at Royd. "I could buy yond little miln five times an' niver miss the price."

Royd let the statement stand; it was a foible of his

to pass as a man of no account, with no more balance at the bank than one half-year's losses would swallow up.

"Ye'll niver mak brass," went on Booth, "so long as ye dandle and fuss ower th' childer as if they wor your own. Ye'll niver mak brass so long as ye get only ten hours a day out on 'em while they can do sixteen. Ye'll be poor until ye can look at an overlooker's whip, I tell ye, an' see the useful side on't."

"That may be," said the other, putting his foot into the stirrup, "but my conscience is all the cleaner for the money that I miss."

He said it from sheer perversity, to draw the retort he knew would be forthcoming; for the pleasure, sour and taciturn, of tickling the rough hide of such as Ephraim Booth was all the humour he could draw from such-like meetings.

"Conscience?" echoed Booth, with a profound oath. "I niver heard that conscience would sell for a penny piece, so what's th' use on't? I'd liefer see one bale o' wool nor all th' consciences 'at war iver made. Nay, nay, ye'd best get back to th' land, if ye can afford to buy ony. Ye'd best keep company wi' sich as Bancroft o' th' Heights, an' spend brass i'stead of addling it."

Royd was in the saddle by this time, but he stayed awhile, his keen eyes fixed on Booth, and a half-smile upon his lips; nor did the other guess that he was providing entertainment of a sort for this customer to whom he was "giving a piece of his mind."

"Times are changing, Mr. Booth," he said quietly. "We were proud of our birth once on a time, but now it seems a man is best without it."

"Ay, ye talk sense for once. Birth? There's no brass in't; it willun't mak a single yard o' worsted cloth that iver I heard on. It's rough-handed chaps that's going to be th' big folk i' Marshcotes an' Ling Crag."

"Lord help us then," laughed Royd, who had learned to meet men with rough weapons or with smooth.

"What have ye done, ye gentlefolk?" went on the other, with growing wrath. "Your father, now. He drank an' he hunted, an' his lands went wi' him. Bancroft's the very marrow of him—hunts an' drinks, but niver turns one bit o' silver into gold; an' they say he's well-nigh broken up already wi' debt. Then there's Squire Cunliffe at Wynyates, as mad as a bog-lanthorn; he does reckon to mak brass, if all I hear be true—tries to mak it wi' charcoal an' chemicals an' a ha'porth of old wives' miracle-talk."

"He kills no children with work and want of food," put in the other grimly,—"nor will you ever hear the lash swing up at Wynyates."

"More fool him, then—ay, more fool ye—to think ye can addle owt without it. It's all varry weel, Royd o' Hazel Miln, to come here wi' your smooth hands an' your hatchet face,—they're all your father left ye, begow, save th' shirt upon your back,—it's all weel enough to come here and play God Almighty when ye see a little un touched wi' th' whip. It's fine to show all th' parish that childer needn't wark no more nor ten hours a day. But what does it come to, eh? Ye lake at wark, an' ye're a poor man to-day; *I* think o' nowt but wark, day-long an' neet-long; I doan't spare myseln, an' I willun't spare ony that warks for me—

an' if ye doubt th' rights on't, ye've nobbut to look at my brass, an' that'll show ye. An' so I telled yon fine-feathered Parson Horrocks, when he came clevering here awhile back wi' his talk o' milk an' feeding spoons for th' childer."

Royd turned his head toward the mill on the sudden, for again the cry of the children had struck, clear and sharp, between the rattle of the frames and the roar of the wheel. He was quiet for a while, and then he looked Booth very straight between the eyes; he had logic to give him that touched his pocket.

"Have you heard that there's talk of a strike?" he said slowly.

"Summat, ay—but there'll be no strike. They've too mich sense to starve, hev th' combers an' th' spinners."

"They are starving as it is, some of them. Suppose there were a strike, Mr. Booth? Would it fare better with the master who worked the children ten hours a day, think ye, or with the one who worked them sixteen, eighteen, twenty hours?"

Booth in his turn was silent for a moment. Then, "Th' wind sits i' that quarter does it? Well there'll be no strike,—an' if there be, ye'll find your folk slip away from ye same as mine. They'll not axe whether ye've treated 'em well—they'll see a chance o' laking, an' they'll tak it. An' it's me, not ye, that'll have summat put by for a rainy day. Now, I'm thrang, an' ye've wasted ower much good time already."

"I have," assented Royd, and touched his horse's flanks.

"Is he deep, or is he a fooil? That's what I want to

know," muttered Booth, as he watched him ride out of the mill-yard. "Nay, he's ower gently born, an' he hes ower little brass, to be owt but a fooil; I niver knew one of his fashion that hed his head screwed on face-foremost."

As for Royd, a measureless distaste was on him—distaste for the new days and the new ways that were building up a fortune for him. Eager to get back to the land he had been as he rode to Goit Mill; the eagerness was deepened now, as he rode home again, with the cry of the children in his ears. His father, as Booth had said, had left him little richer than by the shirt upon his back, but he carried the Royd name—his father's name—and it fitted ill with it that he should just now have bought a hundredweight of yarn, knowing the labour that produced it. The thought was fanciful he told himself, but it remained for all that, like a blurr upon the smooth surface of his prosperity. Royd's face was impenetrable as ever, and none guessed who saw him riding through Ling Crag village—those who muttered as he passed, "There goes th' hardest face i' th' moorside, for all its smoothness"—that the mill-master was shaken to the heart. Not for the first time had he watched the spinners at their work and seen the lash descend, not for the first time had he asked himself if all was well; but not till now had he found himself powerless to throw off his doubts. Longing for the straight, old-fashioned farming life had set the mood in train, had sharpened, too, his sense of contrast between the bleak purlieus of Goit Mill and the upland fields with wind and sun and freedom on their

slopes. He had known no farmer, however grasping or uncouth, who could rival the stark heartlessness of Ephraim Booth; there seemed to be something in the very air of trade that chilled all human sympathy. This Booth—he was in no sense a villain. It did not give him pleasure to see the children's backs grow bent, their faces red with weals; his pleasure was solely in seeing his overlooker get the most work from them that they could give, and cruelty would have seemed wrong-doing to him only if he had been far-sighted enough to see that in the long run it would not pay. He could not be judged by any usual standard; he was rather a machine of wood and steel, turned by the power of greed; he referred all issues to the final test of "brass"; brass was the word most often on his tongue, and his belief in it was sincere as other men's belief in God.

Slowly Royd pieced the man's character together—pieced it from neglected scraps of observation which came back one by one to mind—and he shuddered at the picture. Strange it seemed, that Booth himself should have advised him, "Get ye back to th' land"; the advice was good, moreover, for it grew daily clearer to Stephen Royd that pride—which stands for conscience to such as he—is no good comrade to one who lives by trade.

He had reached the dip of Water Lane by this time, and his thoughts took a lighter turn as he saw two figures standing in the middle of the sunlit road down by Smithbank Farm. One was Billy Puff with his round body, and round red head; the other Tim o' Tabs; and the master-weaver smiled as he heard Tim's

shrill voice and the constable's offended air of dignity—for it was clear that play was going forward here, of the old careless sort, whatever work was being wrung from tired bodies at Goit Mill.

Tim, in fact, was "trailing" Billy Puff—an occupation of which he never wearied when sport of other kinds was not forthcoming. That they had met in Water Lane was to be expected, since both were drawn with growing frequency toward the little streamside farm where Tabitha Hirst made sport of all her suitors. They had reached the stile at the same moment, and Billy, mindful of the majesty of law, had hastened to thrust his body forward before his rival could push through.

The stile was narrow, however. Billy Puff could at no time win through it without great care, and turning of his body sideways, and squeezing of the upper layers of fat against the uprights; and this morning, in his haste to steal a march on Tim, he stuck halfway. Tim and his roguish terrier watched it all complacently with faces that never wore so grave a look except when frolic was toward.

"Dost knaw what they are saying i' Ling Crag?" said Tim presently, as the constable tried vainly to move back or forward.

"Fooilishness for sure. They niver say owt else," answered Billy, with a groan.

"Well, I knaw nowt about that; but they're telling how Billy Puff went coorting through a stile, i'stead o' round by th' yett. An' he like as he stuck there, like a

cork i' a bottle-neck, while Tim o' Tab's louped ower th' wall an' kissed his lass."

Tim set one hand on the wall, as if to prove the story true by practice, but he did not vault over it as yet, for he wished to get the most fun possible from Billy Puff.

"I'll hev the law on ye, as sure as my name's William Reddhiough," sputtered the constable, with another fruitless effort to get free.

"Nay, doan't be proud, lad," murmured the other; "we call thee Billy Puff, tha knaws,—it's homelier like."

The terrier, meanwhile, had received a wink from Tim, and he began to sniff about the constable's unprotected calves with a solicitude that was not reassuring. Billy Puff disliked all dogs, and the terrier most of all her kind; he made redoubled efforts, and tried with one eye to look round severely upon Tim while with the other he kept an anxious watch upon the terrier.

"Call off that dog o' yourn," he faltered; "it's treason, I tell thee, to set a dog upon an officer of His Majesty's."

"Why, she willun't mell on thee! She's that fond, begow, o' th' smell o' th' law, Billy, she niver can get done wi' sniffing. What, ye're through, are ye? By th' Heart, I thowt ye meant to spend a long day there," he broke off, as the constable, with one last despairing effort, wriggled backwards on to the open road.

Billy Puff recovered his dignity, and with it his wondrous power of blowing out his cheeks. "Tim o'

Tab's," he said solemnly, "if I doan't catch thee on one count, I'll imprison thee on another—as a rogue an' a vagabond, wi' no outward an' visible means o' livelihood.

"Catch thyseln on that count, Billy," retorted the other gaily. "If thy means o' livelihood is catching prisoners, tha niver hes an odd un to show for thyseln."

"I shall hev by and by, an' his name is Tim o' Tab's. I hev my trade, an' all—th' God-fearing an' honourable trade o' shoe-mending, as befits one that His Majesty pays none too well."

"When dost wark at it, lad?"

"At th' proper seasons, wheniver th' cares o' peace-keeping an' peace-making leave me free for't," answered Billy, with growing loftiness. "Go, get thee about thy lawful business, Tim—if tha hes ony—an' leave me to mine."

Tim glanced toward the stile. "Kissing Tabitha war what I hed i' mind—is't lawful, Billy?" he murmured.

"It's agen th' law," asserted the constable, with conviction. "I've knawn a man suffer all th' pains an' penalties o' justice for sich-like wark."

"Well, now, here's Maister Royd o' Hazel Miln," cried Tim, glancing up the road, "happen he'll settle th' disputation for us."

Royd was smiling broadly as he neared them—so broadly that Tim o' Tab's concluded he had just driven a good bargain. For Tim could not guess what a welcome contrast the scene presented to the mill-master after his late experiences at the mill.

"We're heving a bit of disputation, like, Maister

Royd," Tim ventured, standing carelessly across the path of Royd's horse.

"Oh, and what is the matter in dispute?" asked Royd, drawing rein good-humouredly,—though only Tim o' Tab's would have ventured to stop Stephen Royd in business hours with such an idle plea.

"Well, Billy Puff here says it's noan just lawful to kiss a wench, an' I say different."

"I'm with you, Tim—for if all foolishness were against the law, there'd be few men out of prison."

"Spoke like a bench o' justices, maister," chuckled the rogue. "It may be fooilish, but it hes a twang to't, there's no denying. An' it comes as nat'ral as gathering bilberries, i' a way o' speaking. Well, it's gooid to be alive to your finger-tips, an' th' chap that's as full o' thankfulness for life as me hes getten nowt mich wrang wi' him."

"No, you're not ailing, Tim," said Royd drily, moving on again; "for a man who earns his living by hard work, you find more leisure than I for one can understand."

"It's all i' th' way you measure your day," said Tim, and turned to resume his interrupted banter of the constable. "Ye an' Maister Royd are different as chalk fro' cheese, an' yet ye're fearful like i' one thing, Billy," he murmured.

"Oh, ay?" said Billy, with slow suspicion. "I' what way are we like?"

"Ye'd both be twice th' men ye are if once ye learned to tak a wench as a wench likes to be ta'en. Ay, 'twould do ye both a power o' gooid."

CHAPTER VII

MOONLIGHT ON THE BENTS

BUSINESS was over for the day. Royd had groomed and fed his saddle-horses, and now he sat in the kitchen of the little two-roomed building that abutted on the mill, and ate the supper for which a long day in the open had given him appetite enough, but little zest. The day's round, save for that droll meeting with Bancroft at the corner of his own potato-field, had been as usual; the lonely supper was such as he had gone through six nights out of the seven any time these years past. A woman came from the neighbouring farm each morning to put his house in order; for the rest he cooked what meals were needful, welcomed little company, and lived as methodically, as tirelessly, as the water-wheel that in the daytime shook his house from roof to floor. He did not seek for pleasure in life, scarcely for content; but he found at most times a sufficient substitute for both in a certain dogged sense that he was struggling against circumstance, and winning.

To-night, however, the black mood was on him that came with persistent regularity to claim the penalty of lonely living. The scene at Goit Mill had set the mood in train; two hours of uncompanioned musing

had deepened it, till now there seemed no sap in life, nor any goodness in the years of stubborn work. Little by little, as he sat there, he pieced together the life of his poorer moorland neighbours, and saw it whole and, wondered at the contrast that it offered—of gaiety and deepest gloom. His business had taken him into the heart of that life, among the weavers, the combers and the spinners; he had brought a keen eye, and a keen, well-balanced mind, to the understanding of it; and he realised—what few of his own generation seemed fully to grasp—how hot a time of change it was, how desperately the old order held its own, while the hard new times were striving to push it to the wall. On the one hand were the workmen of the old type—poor men, who yet were rich in their freedom to work where they would and when they would, who had land about their cottages and could grow their own oats for meal, their own potatoes; who could keep a cow or two, a half-dozen pigs, a flock of geese, it may be; who, when times were hard in the wage-market, could show themselves well able to get food and drink each from his own little centre of production. These were the happy folk; they laboured less than they might have done, and played more often than was needful, and lived day-long with sun and wind and sky about them. On the other hand there were the children, the women, and the men who had been drawn into the foul life of the factories; light and air were shut out from their lives, and their lot, as Royd well knew, was rarely less than misery and often more than degradation. Nor were the children in the worst case; their minds were merci-

feared to send his daughter to tend the spinning-frames of Stephen Royd; but there were two factories at least within the borders of Ling Crag and Marshcotes which could not claim as much; and the better sort, while hampered in their restrictions of age and hours of labour by the rivalry of the few, could not hold aloof from dealing with such as Ephraim Booth.

It was no safe way of thought for a master-weaver, this; and Royd, moved to a sudden impulse of resistance, opened the house-door and went up the trough of Hazel Dene. He would cross to Marshcotes, he told himself, for a long-neglected chat with Parson Horrocks; the Parson had always had a sane and cheery comradeship to offer him; nay, he had done much to mould his boyhood and his manhood, and he knew, as no other did beyond himself, how hardly trade was apt to bear on him at times. The night was fair, with moonlight on the stream and on the sleepy dams; and the rough fields through which he passed to gain the hilltop—the same up which Barbara had gone not long since to carry Parson Horrocks a basketful of eggs—were smoothed and softened to a pearly grey. Here and there the hares were cropping, by twos and threes, and a sudden pitiful cry, with a human note in it, told that somewhere near at hand a net was laid at a field-corner. It was the corner, as it chanced, where the sheep-stile took Royd into the last of the hilltop fields, and as he climbed the stile he saw a well-known figure crouching to the wall and disentangling a hare from out the meshes of the net.

"Begow, it's weel it's nobbut ye, Maister Royd!" cried Tim, soon as he had recovered from his surprise. For wayfarers were rare up here, and Royd's footsteps had been deadened by the grass.

"At the old game, Tim?" laughed Royd. "Well, we learned the way of it together, with Lavrock for our guide, and all Wyecollar Dene to hunt."

"I reckon we did!" cried the other, tapping the hare across the neck and quieting its cries. "An' weel ye framed at it; I've wished mony a time ye hedn't grown so sober-like."

"And so have I," Royd answered, with a frankness that surprised his old-time comrade. "But what would you, Tim? At my age one needs to look to something else than poaching for a living."

"Ay, mebbe—but it's fine an' free, for all that. I allus did say a hare, sitting i' benty grass by moonlight, war th' bonniest sight i' Christendom—better nor th' sight o' fleeces an' combing-pots," he added, glancing slily at the other.

"I'm still puzzled to know how you manage both so well," said Royd, after a pause. He was leaning against the wall now, glad of the moolit warmth, glad of the scent of green spring leafage and the forgetfulness of care it brought.

"So is all th' parish," chuckled Tim, "though it's as plain as eating taties once ye knaw, as I said to ye awhile back i' Water Lane, it's all i' th' way ye measure out th' four-an'-twenty hours. I'm i' bed, we'll say, by four i' th' morning, an' astir by eight; an' what's to

hinder me fro' combing right on to fall o' dusk? Nay, it's a grand way o' life; wark's noan healthy by itseln, without some mak o' poaching sauce to flavour it."

There was a note of raillery in Tim's voice, a suggestion that there was more of jest than sober truth in this description of his working-day; yet he did the work, as Royd knew, and ever since his escapade with Lavrock at the Herders Inn he had been punctual as the sun itself.

"I can judge most men," said Royd slowly, "but I never yet could reckon you up, Tim, for all the years I've known you."

"I'm ower simple, that's where it is," Tim ventured soberly; "I'm that innocent like, a child could tak me in."

Again Royd laughed light-heartedly. "That's as may be. Do you mind the talk we had not long ago at Hazel Mill?"

"Ay, I mind—about th' strike that's threatening?"

Royd nodded.

"Well, they're getting uneasy, more so ivery day, is th' combers; wheniver a chap comes up fro' Bradforth-way, an' tells 'em what's agate down yonder, they like as they willun't be behindhand if there's ony grumbling to be done. But I'm doing my best, Maister Royd; they've allus gi'en me credit for a bit o' sense—that shows they're fooils to start wi'—an' when I tell 'em ye're worth all th' masters i' Bradforth, an' that they're fratching wi' their bread-and-butter if they fratch wi' ye, they oppen their mouths and gape; an' at after they've done gaping, they say there mud be summat

in't; but, bless ye, th' next time I put my head inside a combing-shop, there's all the owd talk going on again as hard as iver."

"It may end in talk, even yet, Tim."

"Ay, it may. We'll hope so. Happen ye'd like a hare or so?" he broke off, pointing to the spoil that lay at his feet.

"Tim, you scoundrel, do you want to tar me with the same brush?" laughed Royd, as he moved off up the slope.

"That's what th' Parson allus says," went on the other imperturbably,—"but the game seems to find its way into his kitchen for all that. Well, we willun't say no more about it, maister. If ye find a hare on th' doorstun when you get home to-neet—why, I reckon it'll hev come there by itseln."

It was a peculiarity of Ling Crag hares and grouse, this fondness for creeping to the thresholds of houses belonging to Tim's friends—creeping there to die, so it seemed, for they were always stone-cold when daylight strode across the dark moor-ridges and found them there.

"Says he cannot reckon me up, does th' maister?" murmured Tim o' Tab's as he folded his net and put it in an inner pocket. "I could hev said th' same to him, an' not been far fro' th' truth. What's agate wi' him to-neet? He seemed fain as a lad to see a bit o' sport again, an' he laughed wi' his belly, as if he meant it, like; yet to-morn, sure as iver I go to th' miln for wool, there'll be th' owd mask pulled ower his face, an' his mouth 'ull be shut as tight as a ratten-

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trap. Well he finds me queer, just as I find him, so I munnot complain. Happen he's getten a man's happiness, an' a man's pride, to see to, same as I hev." His unpatched eye dwelt lingeringly upon the further hump of moor that hid the house of Wynyates from his sight. "Poor Squire! Ye'd better hev been born i' a littlish farmstead, same as me; there's less pride in't, an' less wark to keep your head held high."

Tim o' Tab's was counted the least serious man in all the parish; yet these benty moonlit fields—his staunchest friends and only confidants—could have told a different tale. So still he was to-night, indeed, that a hare came lop-lopping across the grass to within a score yards of him, and stayed there, feeding tranquilly, while Tim let his thoughts go wool-gathering out to Wynyates, and back again to the farm in the grassy hollow where Tabitha Hirst had dwelling. His thoughts were deep indeed, or they would never have blinded him to the nearness of fur or feather; and they were concerned with the question which not long since he had asked little Barbara in Smithbank Lane. Barbara had suspected him of jesting when he asked if wedlock were permissible to a man who held another's secret; but the scruple was sincere, and it had cost Tim the ne'er-do-weel many an hour of troubled speculation. For an unwedded man, Tim knew more of women than he had a right to; the favourite of all, with an eye for opportunity which his poaching life had quickened, he had learned many a lesson from the moorside lasses,—and the lesson he had learned most thoroughly, so he always said, was to measure the length of a long

tongue. Perhaps his love for Tabitha, which was growing faster than he guessed, had sharpened his sense of duty to the Squire; perhaps, as he looked across the hills to-night, he remembered how in his childhood Squire Cunliffe had found him lost in a snow-drift over yonder, how he had carried him, all but dead, to Wynyates and had brought back the life to him; perhaps, too, he recalled all the Squire's after-kindness, —that rare, unselfish tenderness that a man feels toward a fellow-being whom he has saved from death, —or it may be his knowledge of a stranger and a newer bond between them made him swear softly to himself, here where the world was quiet and the moonlight lay upon the bents, that he would never, for any woman's sake, endanger the Squire's secret. For once in his life Tim did not see the humorous side of the matter, nor guess how the motive of his sacrifice would have moved his world to laughter; he was young to self-denial as yet, and he hugged it with a fine fever of resolve that lasted till the moon was dipping westward. He stirred then from his position at the stile, and glanced behind him, and found a very human sequel to his musings.

"Tabitha 'll be sleeping," he murmured, turning down toward the valley. "She'll be fast i' sleep as a butter-cup, will th' lass, an' what's to hinder me fro' snatching a peep at her chamber-window?"

Royd, meanwhile, had reached the Parsonage, and Parson Horrocks himself had opened the door to him.

"Why, 'tis Stephen! Come in, lad, and be sure of a warm welcome!" cried the Parson cheerily.

"It is late for a visit, eh?" cried Royd, as he followed his host into the snug parlour; "but the night was tempting, sir, and the clock pointed to no later than eight when I set off."

"Then you walked more slowly than I did at your years. What! 'Tis nine now. Confess, lad—you've been taking counsel of the spring about some maid or other." This with a side-glance of kindly shrewdness. "You'll say, of course, your thoughts were all of noils and tops and worsted yarn, and I, of course, shall not believe you."

"The spring does not find me worth that sort of counsel, I'm afraid. If you must have the truth, Parson, I met Tim o' Tab's in the Dene fields, and stayed for a crack with him."

"Ah, was he poaching? Yes, I thought as much. 'Tis a sad rascal, Stephen." His eyes were twinkling as he brought a second chair up to the table, which was already laid for supper. "You're just in time, lad, for I have had a long ride across the moors to see a sick parishioner, and have only just returned. What have we here? Why, a hare, as I live," he broke off, lifting a cover from the dish at the head of the table.

Royd understood then why his host's face was full of such sly merriment. "Tim is indeed a sad rascal, sir," he put in, "I wonder you should let his hares be seen upon a godly table."

"Well, well, I know nothing of such matters. Parsons are poor, as all the world knows, and if kindly folk leave gifts by night, and modestly withdraw from thanks—why, 'tis discourteous to inquire over closely.

And are times good with you, Stephen? Do the Heights lands come any nearer? Come, you are playing with your food; I never did that at your age, never."

"I supped so very lately, sir. Yes, times are good, so far as money goes. There's enough now to buy back the Heights, leaving something over with which to meet the future. But where is the use?"

"Use enough, I should have thought, to one who had learned to wait as you have learned."

"I am growing tired of waiting," said Royd slowly. "It came to me only to-day how tired I was, when I was passing Bancroft's lands, and stopped to smell the good reek of the furrows I used to know. Bancroft caught me in the trespass, as it chanced."

"And made the most of it, I warrant. I often wonder, Stephen, if he'll end by forcing you to hate him. 'Twould be a pity, that, for he's not worth an honest hatred."

"So I was thinking, as I rode down the hill this morning after seeing him. Yet hatreds have been come to for less cause,—he holds my lands, sir, and he will never give me the chance to buy them back."

"Never is a long while, lad, and the man who says never is less full of wit than I think Stephen Royd to be. The land will come to you, if only you can wait."

"Then, too, there is the question of the strike. Fortunes will be won and lost, Parson, before we have seen the end of this year's discontent."

The Parson was silent for a while. He, too, had

passed a heavy hour this evening, as he rode home across the moor; his mind, like Royd's, had been dwelling on the under-life of trade, and his cheerful front to-night was due only to his eagerness to keep Royd from a line of thought which he knew had troubled him often in the past.

"Strikes?" he cried, unable longer to keep silence. "I marvel that we have not strikes at every month's end. See, Stephen, I have passed threescore, and it is hard to be brought face to face with a still darker side of life than I had guessed at. They are too proud, these folk of mine, to tell me what their children suffered; there was no need for me, I thought, to go and see for myself what went on within the mills. It was all hearsay to me—rumour scarce credited—until that February night when we rode home from Wynyates together. Do you remember, Stephen, the child who swayed and stumbled up the road before us?"

"Yes, I remember; I was at Goit Mill this very afternoon, and looked for the child, but I could not see her there."

"She has been ailing—like to die, she was, at one time—but the mother tells me she will be about again in a week or so; Booth of the mill has not killed her yet, it seems."

"You went to Goit Mill not long since? I heard as much to-day."

"Could I do less, lad? I had kept away too long, through not crediting the tales I heard of it. But it was useless; Booth, I believe, when I went in among the spinning-frames determined to excel himself in

cruelty; at any rate, I hope to God that what I saw there was no usual sight."

Royd, if he looked for a different mood from Parson Horrocks—a mood that should soothe his own sense of difficulty—was braced by the very challenge which a while since, coming from himself, had set his doubts in train.

"It was a usual sight, sir. What then? I decline to accept responsibility for such as Ephraim Booth," he answered doggedly.

"Of course you refuse, lad," cried the other, with a quick glance of surprise. "None but a fool would saddle you with such responsibility. There! you must let an old man talk. It is so new to me, all this, and the cry of the children is spoiling the sunshine and the spring for me, lad Stephen."

The younger man began to realise how deep the Parson's wound was, and instinctively his voice softened. "It is a time of change, sir, and times will be worse before we reach the good that is sure to come from them. Booth and his generation will go by—but machinery will remain, and none knows yet how near the world will come to a second Golden Age."

"We've left that behind us, twenty years ago," muttered the Parson, filling his glass afresh.

"No, sir, and no again! We shall see the combing-machine and the power-loom perfected, as well as the spinning-frame. We shall manufacture cloth with fifty times the speed, and a fiftieth of the labour that it costs to-day. Men will have leisure to *live*, after their short day's work is done."

"Yet the hours increase already. It is the old tale, Stephen, the more we have the more we shall want. The rich will learn new ways of extravagance, and the poor will not be content with simple needs."

Royd argued, steadily, closely, with an outlook on the future that was oddly compact of idealism and clearsightedness. He was another man altogether since leaving Hazel Mill behind him; his despondency was gone; he was swung for the moment into that extreme belief in the future of his trade which opposition more than once had roused in him. There was a fine light in his eyes, a crisp ring in his voice, which now and then had gone near to carry the Parson's rooted conservatism by storm. But not to-night; Parson Horrocks stood too close to present realities yet,—and he had reached the age, moreover, when men look back upon the lessons of experience, and doubt any future whose happiness depends upon wry human nature.

"The new era has begun," he said, by way of summing up their talk,—"has begun with pauper-labour, that removes at one stroke the dignity of thrifty toil. The new era is scarce in its teens yet, Stephen—yet it has bred hunchbacks and weaklings already among our children."

"They are the martyrs, sir. Every upward movement has been built on some such martyrdom," said Royd, pushing back his chair.

"You are not going, lad?" cried the Parson, with something of his old manner. "Why, then, I've wearied you, and I must promise to talk of brighter things—of the maid, say, who kept you so deep in

thought that it took you an hour to cross from Hazel Mill."

"The maid, if it was a maid detained me, carried a net and wore one eye patched," laughed the other. "No, I must be going, Parson, it is after ten, and I have to be up by five to-morrow."

"Bless me! I'll never deny that you work, Stephen. Well then, if you must go—but at the least you'll promise to come soon again?"

He walked to the gate with his guest, and they stood awhile looking over the starlit burial-ground that hid so many storm-tossed wayfarers. Each fell into his own train of thought; and when at last Parson Horrocks broke the silence, it was but to re-open the old question.

"Stephen," he said, "I am not so young as I once was; I cannot shake off my burdens as I could, and I am apt, I know, to harp on the one sad string. I cannot rid me of the thought of the master of Goit Mill, with his gospel of 'brass, brass,' and his children whom he feeds with the self-same food he gives his pigs. There was misery enough in Marshcotes, lad, as I knew it five-and-thirty years ago—but it was straightforward, human misery, and there was always a chance of sunshine between the clouds. We are changing that; folk have no leisure for healthy hates and loves—there's poverty sits on the threshold, and men and women must do anything for money."

"Life is a tangle, Parson; it is well to have such faith in an after-life as yours," said Royd.

The words slipped from him; he scarcely knew that

he had uttered them; they were not the outcome of his late enthusiasm, nor yet altogether of the black mood that had gone before,—rather they summed up a score of contrary emotions which once, in the days before little Barbara had grown to womanhood, had passed him by.

The Parson sighed as he looked across the graveyard and thought of how, upon that bitter February night, he had stood here, torn with pity for a child's fate, and had asked himself if God were sleeping.

"Faith has its doubts, lad," he murmured,—"though we must not let the quiet sleepers yonder hear us. There are those in Marshcotes here, Stephen, who do the worst for this world and the next;" the old man fell into silence once again; then roused himself, as if to throw off a distasteful topic.

"Stephen," he said, searching Stephen's face by the light of the waning moon, "if you can afford to buy up Bancroft and his acres, you can afford to marry. Faith lies that way for such as you."

"True," said the other, with a hard laugh; "but where's the maid would have me, sir? I'm grown too old, and my groove is wearing deep already."

"The more reason you should be plucked out of it, lad; women will have none of grooves, and a wife would make a new man of you within the year."

Royd looked across the graveyard, and back at the old Parson; and a little-wonted confidence moved him.

"Parson," he said slowly, "I did not keep my secrets from you in the old days."

"Nor would do now, if I had any say over you."

"How if I told you I would never marry, because there's only one woman I could think of as a wife?"

The Parson rubbed his hands together softly; he had not expected such frank confession. "Bless me, that is a strange reason!" he murmured. "If there were a dozen maids you could think of so, lad, why, it would be difficult to choose. But one—"

"Ay, but the one is gently born and gently bred, and she does not like the smell of wool."

"Lad! I despair of you. It's not that you're a fool at bottom, and that makes folly sinful in you. D'ye think a woman cares what else a man does so long as he can make her love him? D'ye think they stop to weigh pence and half-pence, like you niggard trading-folk? Stephen, Stephen, you have made little use of your five-and-thirty years. Little Barbara is wiser at eighteen than you."

Spite of himself, there was an eagerness in Stephen's voice.

"Barbara?" he echoed. "So you know my secret, Parson?"

"I had seen you with her, Stephen, and my eyes are not so dim yet as they will be by and by."

"Have you seen how she begins to turn from me?" he broke in, with another sudden change of voice. "Have you seen how she shuns Hazel Mill, and how she almost fears to say good-morrow when she meets me in the road?"

Again the Parson chuckled. "I have seen, lad, and it has gladdened me. Nay, I'll not tell thee why. Only, 'tis sad that young men know so little of young maids."

Each seemed loth to say good-night; and each stayed halting at the Parsonage gate, with that strange quiet of the kirkyard stealing over them—the quiet of dead men who sleep against the coming of the Judgment Day, the quiet which, for depth and restfulness, is like no other stillness upon earth. Even the stars were shrouded now, as if heaven had turned down its myriad lamps and was watching in the hush of mourner's dark above the dead. A sparrow fluttered in the ivied church-tower, and was still again; a night-hawk screamed once from the moor above as it glanced down to strike; and then the silence crept on padded feet once more, and only the wind among the gravestones made complaint. Royd remembered afterwards the least detail of the scene—for this was to prove for him the still hour that goes before the dawn of hope.

"I, too, have had my secrets from you," said the Parson very softly. "I, too, have known love, Stephen—nay, it is long ago, and the sting has all gone by; but I would not see another stumble on as blindly as I have done. Look ye, lad, quit money-making for awhile, and look about you and see if there be any meaning in the spring; and you'll win more than the Heights lands—you'll win a mistress for them, Stephen."

"One could believe anything to-night, with you for counsellor. Yet, it's an All-Fool's chase, when all is said."

"How is it, lad, that you alone are blind to what is the common gossip of the moorside? No man in Marshcotes would give a rush for Bancroft's chances

of remaining at the Heights a year. Yet you will not credit it."

"I long for it too much," cried Royd impetuously. "I *will* not believe it, sir, until I have sure proof."

"I have heard, for all that, that hope is almost as helpful a comrade as certainty. However, go your way, lad—and come to me to hear me say 'I told you so' when the Heights lands come back to you."

CHAPTER VIII

ON THE THRESHOLD

ROYD left the Parson, as he had left him times and again in the old days of struggle, with new-found hope, new readiness to acknowledge that his groove was not worn so deep after all but he might yet escape from it. He let his thoughts run where they would, with a liberty denied them heretofore; he saw the long low house upon the hill that had been the goal of every enterprise, the prize of every hardship; he saw little Barbara there, singing to him in the summer-dusk after he had come in from a long day in the saddle; he understood the tenderness, the strength, the sweet and reasonable glory of that love which is the crown of life; he heard the patter of young feet upon the creaking oaken stair, and looked across at Barbara as she sang, and saw the love-light and the mother-light grow dreamy in her eyes. Never in his life had Stephen Royd known such an hour as this; never had he ridden by the waterway of Hazel Dene and dismounted at his door with such deep impulses at work in him. For his love was a man's, in that it had strength to see realities and welcome them; it was a boy's in that it was his first, and thrall to all dulcet whispers of the spring.

Yet after he had gone in at the house-door and seated himself beside the fireless hearth, his new mood weakened. Association was too strong for him. It was here, in the little two-roomed house that he had fought the long fight; here that he had lived—he, a Royd of the Heights—with no more outward show than any labourer of his own could compass; here that he had scraped and saved, and pondered on investments, and made the most of every penny that hard work had brought him. And now he was back amidst it all, and his dreams of a moment since, fired by an old parson's hopefulness, receded as the dew gives back before a scorching sun. This was his life, must always be his life; he felt its shackles round him; it seemed hopeless he should ever free himself. Quick to hope he had been to-night, contrary to his usual habit; and, contrary to his usual habit, he was quick to swing into extreme despondency. That picture he had drawn of the long low house upon the hill—what child's play it was. Barbara, if she sought a home, would take it from other hands than his. He knew how to handle guineas, and how to woo fortune roughly in the open market; but the years had not taught him any other sort of wooing, and he could find no quality in himself that should stir a maid's fancy by one single pulse-beat. Bancroft, moreover, would never let him own the Heights; and that was his only chance of getting back to land, for live elsewhere he could and would not.

Late as the night was, there was a guest riding up toward Hazel Mill who was to put such thoughts behind the master of Hazel Mill for many a day—a guest

who was in all respects the opposite of Stephen Royd. Lawyer Fairchild, indeed, as he came up the Dene and sniffed the freshness of the warm spring night, did not look like a man who harboured sentiment or doubts of any kind, except as to a client's solvency. He stopped awhile, before he drew rein at the door, to look on what the dim light showed him of the house, and a faint and soothing purr of satisfaction came from his thick throat, with its double layers of pink flesh beneath the chin.

"You are hoodwinking the whole countryside, Stephen Royd," he murmured. "They see you living hand-to-mouth in a two-roomed hovel, and they say you're not worth much more than the clothes you stand up in. I could tell them another tale—if I had the indiscretion."

The secret would have been out, however, if any of the Marshcotes folk had witnessed Lawyer Fairchild's greeting to his host; for there were few men who could temper obsequious warmth to so nice a calculation of a man's fortune.

"I rode to see Mr. Bancroft of the Heights on business, and dined with him," explained the lawyer, glancing round the bare walls that always moved him to fresh admiration of his client's shrewdness; "and as I was so near to you, I thought I would call in passing and share a friendly glass."

Royd was already setting glasses on the table, though he rarely drank wine except when hospitality demanded it.

"You come in a good hour," he said, "and that for two reasons, Mr. Fairchild."

"Then am I doubly welcome, eh? Your reasons, sir, first and second?"

"First, because thought is an ill wife to a man; second, because I have some money lying idle, and I want a good investment."

"The coincidence is odd—it is most marked," said the lawyer, rubbing his riding-breeches with both hands as he leaned forward in his chair.

Royd looked in question at his guest.

"Why, because the business that took me to the Heights this afternoon is all in favour of a good investment. Do you care for land, Mr. Royd? Or do you seek some other way of using your spare capital?"

Royd started forward in his chair, then fell back again with instinctive sense that he must not show himself too eager; yet his voice was husky a little as he responded, for he recalled what Parson Horrocks had lately told him touching the moorside gossip about Bancroft.

"Do you mean that—that the Heights—"

"Is to be mortgaged. Precisely. Does it surprise you, Mr. Royd?"

It did surprise Royd, for he had longed too ardently for this to grasp its possibility. The lawyer filled the pause that seemed like to follow by babble of young Bancroft's extravagance, his debts and difficulties; and Royd, as he listened, wondered vaguely if this smooth old man of law talked so much at large upon his own

affairs. Yet the one thought only held his mind, and for awhile it stunned him; the Heights was to be mortgaged, and he had money to buy up the mortgages; and after that—why, mortgages were apt to fall in when a spendthrift sought the road to ruin.

"Mr. Bancroft will find it difficult to pull up, I fear," the lawyer was saying when Royd came out of his abstraction. "I should have called on you at a more Christian hour, Mr. Royd, but for my host's extravagancy. After we had dined, he must set me down to drink with him,—or seem to drink, for I value a clear head,—and when at last I thought to make good my escape, I found he was deeper in his cups than I had guessed, and I had perforce to see him to his bed."

"Is the whole property to be mortgaged—the house and lands, and all the farms?" he asked, disregarding the lawyer's tattle. "I should have thought he would have mortgaged them one by one, not all together."

"Ay, but he shrank from the notion. He has held his head too high in the parish, and he would not borrow on his property till he was driven to it. He had kept few accounts; he scarcely knew how deep in debt he was; and then the whisper went abroad that his credit was worth nothing, and the creditors began to press. Pay one, pay all, he found that he must mortgage every yard of land to meet his liabilities. A sad story, Mr. Royd, a sad story." The lawyer's eyes were misty; for the spectacle of a man throwing money—hard, golden guineas—into the mire had always power to touch his feelings.

Royd's stupefaction was over. Alert and keen again, he pushed to one side the knowledge that this was the crown of a life's work to him, and remembered only that here was a clear bargain to be driven. His coolness, indeed, when measured by the years of striving and of hoping that had been devoted to this very object, was such as his father would have applauded.

"I do not care much for land," he said quietly; "but if the sum advanced were well covered—"

"Well covered?" broke in the lawyer. "The Heights lands are—"

"You will pardon me," Royd interrupted in his turn, smiling slightly, "but I should know more of the Heights lands, and of their value, than you can tell me. They were good land once, Mr. Fairchild,—in my father's day,—but they have gone back in the last twenty years. The Bancrofts, father and son, have grudged labour and the constant tillage that the land must have. They have let the farm-buildings go much their own way, and the dilapidations are serious. It needs experience to handle land aright. How much does Mr. Bancroft wish to borrow?"

"Twelve thousand pounds—a big sum to a landed gentleman, sir, but a trifle to the prosperous mill-owner." The lawyer's voice was smooth, for he had set his mind on negotiating the business without delay, and had indeed stopped at Royd's door to-night with no other purpose.

"Softly, Mr. Fairchild, softly," laughed the other. "Twelve thousand is no trifle to any man, and the

Heights property would scarcely fetch the half of it in the open market. I will lend eight thousand on the security you offer."

"But, sir, this is hard bargaining on your part; I naturally wished to do the best for both my clients—to raise money for the one, and to offer an admirable investment to the other—but eight thousand! It is a paltry sum. I must search elsewhere, I fear, if I am to do justice to Mr. Bancroft's interests." This with a quick glance at Royd.

The other did not move a muscle. "As you please," he said carelessly. "I do not care over much for land, as I said, and if you can secure a larger sum elsewhere, by all means do so."

"We should be able to come to better terms,—indeed, I think that with a little give-and-take on either side we might arrange the matter," said the lawyer hastily. For the Heights lay far from any beaten track, and he doubted if any man would take up the mortgage, even for eight thousand pounds, so readily as Stephen Royd, whose folk had lived there aforetime.

Royd, practised in reading the temper of a man, knew that he held the matter in the hollow of his hand. "Mr. Fairchild," he said brusquely, "it is not sound business, as you know, to advance money up to the full value of the land mortgaged. Suppose we say this property is worth twelve thousand? It is a generous estimate. Well, I am willing to lend ten thousand on it and not a penny more. Will your client be satisfied with that, or do you propose to go elsewhere?"

The lawyer thought awhile, then, "I will see what

can be done," he said. "Mr. Bancroft will be disappointed, doubtless, but you have met me a certain way in the matter. Yes, yes, I think it can be arranged."

Royd drew a long breath. He knew that the business was as good as settled; if any other man stepped in with a larger offer—a chance remote enough to be neglected—then Lawyer Fairchild would come to him again; if not, the mortgage would fall to him at the sum he had named. He would have advanced double the amount, in point of fact; but the other, shrewd enough upon occasion, was a child in Royd's hands when business was toward.

"There! we are free to talk of lighter matters. I hope that I have done a good day's work for both sides," cried the lawyer, tapping his snuff-box and handing it to his host. "I always take a pinch, Mr. Royd, after finishing a business talk; it seems to clinch the matter, sir, and to give it a fragrance of its own."

As for Royd, he could scarcely keep up a show of talk while the lawyer sipped his wine and gossiped of fifty trivial matters. The long low house upon the hill was his at last—was his in sure prospect if not in present ownership. He wished to be alone with his contentment, and the other's slow enjoyment of his wine seemed long protracted to the last degree.

"You know Squire Cunliffe well?" said the lawyer by and by, glancing quietly at Royd.

"He is one of the oldest of my friends," Royd answered, and the other could not understand his flush, nor knew that at the moment he was thinking of little Barbara.

"Ah, is he—is he sound, think ye?"

"Sound?" cried Royd, turning round upon the lawyer; "if any man in Marshcotes or Ling Crag is sound, it is Squire Cunliffe."

The lawyer took another pinch of snuff, and another sip of wine. "Well, well, one has one's doubts. The gentry live so fast a pace nowadays, and everywhere the men of trade seem to be stepping into older shoes. So he is sound, say ye? I am glad to hear as much, very glad, for he bears a good name on the Bench, and a good name in the parish."

Royd lifted his brows; it was old news that Squire Cunliffe was in good repute within the borders of his own world, and he wondered if Lawyer Fairchild could find no fresher gossip than this.

"And trade, Mr. Royd?" went on the other. "There are whispers of unrest down Saxilton way. They talk of a strike. I trust your simpler folk upon the moors here are more contented with their lot."

"I trust so too," Royd answered grimly. "It is touch and go, Mr. Fairchild,—they are 'havy-cavy,' as we say in Marshcotes, and a breath one way or the other may turn the balance."

"Ah, that is a pity. Arcadian simplicity—content—all disappearing, eh?" murmured the lawyer, with the light air of one who is well fed and well lined with wine.

"I never found much difference as to content," laughed Royd. "There's no man so rustic but he has wit to find a hundred causes of complaint. What, must you go already? Then let me see you to your horse.

He did not return within doors after bidding farewell to his guest, but crossed the beck and made up the pasture-fields until he reached the highway out to Wynyates. He had to start on a long ride at five of the next morning, as he had told Parson Horrocks, but there could be no question of sleep for him until he had snatched a peep at the old homestead. His chance had come to him, after twenty years of waiting; the mortgage would be his beyond a doubt, and by and by, if all went well, he would foreclose. For Bancroft he had no feeling of any kind; he was merely the puppet who stood between himself and what he coveted with all his brain and all his heart; his sneers were forgotten, his scarce-credited rivalry for Barbara's hand; he could not hate him, as he had thought to do awhile since—he simply glanced beyond him to the goal in sight.

Never was night more kindly to a heated fancy. The moon, down-dropping toward the heath, whose harshest lines it softened, was set in a tender sky of blue and amethyst and opal; the wind, too lazy to do anything but stir at fitful intervals, had captured a whole year's warmth and a whole year's fragrance, so it seemed, from the budding bracken and the breaking ling-leaves over which it passed; a night when the thought of a maid is sweet, and remembrance of endeavour past is restful.

Silent the land stretched out before him; to the left, the dip of Hazel Dene, and beyond it the dim and solitary moor; to the right, the wider trough of Conie Crag Ravine, on the farther slope of which stood the two houses—the Heights and Wynyates—which

bounded Royd's world upon the sunward side. To right and left, to front and rear, the ranged wonderland of hills, line beyond line, curve beyond curve, receding into the purple gloaming of the moors. Well as he loved it all, it had never shown so fair a face to Royd; and he, who had snatched joy at hazard for twenty years, and had had little leisure for piety of any sort, could only thank God for His clemency.

He could see the Heights now—the long low gable, the dark lines of trees that shut it in, the dipping, kindly fields below—and he saw it with new eyes. He had let his heart run out to Barbara to-night; but she, had she plighted troth with him, might well have harboured jealousy for this house that stood neighbour to old Wynyates. Let him live constant as he might to her, there would ever be two loves in his life—love of Barbara, and passion for the homestead of his race.

It had been almost a nightly pilgrimage with him, this walk to the corner of the road from which he could see the house of his desire across the intervening valley; and now, as he leaned against the wall, and looked, and felt the new thrill of possession master him, he could scarce realise what the night's work had done for him. A grouse plained from up the moor; the note was a part of all old dreams. A farm-lad's lantern twinkled on the slope; he knew the gleam of it, and hazarded a guess that there was sickness in the mistals. The kindliness of other days was with him; and on the Heights there was the rose-red dawn of many days to come. Whatever the future held for Stephen Royd, he had

had his hour of life, here within sight of the long low house upon the hill.

The same impulse stirred him by and by that had stirred graceless Tim o' Tab's. Barbara would be sleeping, up at Wynyates yonder; her chamber-window would be open to the mellow night; what if he went, like any love-sick lad, and whispered a God-speed to her dreams? Down the long slack he went, and up the rise, and into the Wynyates courtyard. The moonlight was greying on her window; from within the house the squire's mastiff bayed in echo to his footsteps; there was a strange eeriness about the homestead, and failing moon and baying of the dog seemed in drear accordance with each other. But Royd heeded them not; he was swung beyond himself to-night; he remembered what the Parson had said to him, of Bancroft and of Barbara; and he told himself that surely both prophecies must come true, since one had been so quickly verified.

Only the owls and the fitful breeze knew what he thought as he stood and watched the window; but Barbara, even as a child, had touched his chivalry and tenderness, and since childhood's days her claims on him had deepened. Reverence, to a surety, there was; he was strong enough for that. And under the reverence a keen, deep need of her was present.

He was roused by footsteps on the courtyard stones, and looking up he saw the figure of the Squire, bent almost beyond recognition. Like one who is heavy with sleep walked Squire Cunliffe, and he gazed in doubt at the unexpected watcher.

"It is I, sir,—Stephen Royd,—I fear I startled you," said the younger man, coming to himself more quickly than the older.

The Squire fumbled with his hands, and his voice was tired and heavy. "Stephen? Have you called then, and they would not disturb me at my—at my work—to come and entertain you?"

"No, I have not called," the other answered softly. "I could not sleep, and so walked up and down the road to drive the vapours out; and Wynyates looked so calm beneath the moonlight that I stayed still to look at it."

The Squire, though the meeting was late beyond all claims upon his hospitality, could not forget old usage. "You will take a glass of wine with me, Stephen, before you walk home again?"

"I thank you, no, sir. It is time that both of us were abed."

He paused a moment, full of his great news of the Heights, and eager to confide it to a friend's ear; but he refrained—partly from a reticence ingrained, and partly from regard for the Squire's air of weariness—and swung off down the road after a good-night given and received. The omission was to cost him much, could he have known it; but there was never a doubt in his mind as he strode uphill and down, and nursed his picture of Barbara at the Heights.

A gay voice came up the dark of Hazel Dene as he neared the mill, and he wondered who could be abroad at this late hour.

"The moon is on the bents, old lads,
And the hares are still and grey,
An' there's use i' a net at th' gap of a wall
When ye've nobbut learned th' way."

came the song.

Royd laughed as he recognised the voice, and the spirit of the verse, which in itself proclaimed the songster to be Tim o' Tab's.

"Now poachers three for keepers five
Are enough of a match, begow,
Or else we'se find no way to thrive
By making parsley grow.

We sowed it thick i' th' spring,
An' a rare rich crop it's born;
An' hares are fain of a parsley-ring
As a mare is fond of corn."

The singer stopped midway in his song as he brushed against Royd in the darkness.

"So you're home to bed at last, Tim?" Royd cried.

"Oh, it's ye, is't? That's queer, Maister Royd, for it's th' second time to-neet," answered Tim, searching the darkness with an eye that was well accustomed to it. "Ay, I'm home to bed, for I've no belly, like, for poaching."

"Why, I fancied you'd been at it ever since I saw you last."

"Nay,"—Tim's voice was sheepish,—"nay, I like as I went to look at a wench's chamber-window. I'm young for my years, maister, ye see, an' ye'll noan understand sich fooilishness."

"Maybe not," said Royd, and went down the rough pathway by the stream.

The meeting pleased him well. Tim and he had been good friends together in their boyhood; and to-night, in their manhood, they had obeyed the self-same impulse.

"He shall have a free run of the Heights lands when I come to my own again," murmured Royd.

And he remembered that Barbara, too, was very partial to this same Tim o' Tab's.

CHAPTER IX

HOW THE PARISH WENT TO KIRK

THE stocks at Marshcotes were set, with a pretty dryness of wit, fair between the church and the Bull Tavern; nor could a better site have offered, since on the one hand the sinners drinking in the Bull could take a salutary warning from them, and on the other hand, the godly sort, as they came from church, could have a full and satisfactory view of any erring brother who chanced to be suffering for his misdeeds. Sunday, indeed, was the favourite day for imprisoning culprits in the stocks; and on this sunny Sabbath morning they were graced by no less notorious a character than Tim o' Tabs. His terrier was close on his right hand, and master and dog had never shown so great a likeness to one another as now, when they were sitting side by side, each with his patched right eye, each with a grave sense of publicity and a gay disregard of shame. A little way off stood Billy Puff, gloating over his captive, and reminding Tim from time to time that he had vowed to be even with him soon or late; and Tim himself was disposed to think this a heavy price for the jests he had enjoyed at Billy Puff's expense.

There was Sabbath in the air of Marshcotes village; the steep street, hidden by the shoulder of the tavern,

leaned sleepily against the hillside, and no clamour of lumbering wains or of heavy pack-horse hoofs disturbed its silence; from the grey kirk there came the voices of men who praised their Maker for His gifts of sun and shower and western wind; the flowers that bloomed above the graves gave out, it seemed, a softer and a deeper fragrance than they did on working days, and from the moor beyond there came such scents as only spring and sunshine can draw from peat and bilberry. ling and the budding bracken shoots. The world sat with folded hands, and dreamed awhile, and fancied time stood still upon this day of rest. And over all there was that peace not easy to be understood—that quiet look of the house-fronts, and hush of feet upon the road, which in themselves proclaim the Sabbath.

Only the rascal in the stocks disturbed the sense of quiet. Neighbours had passed, and had stayed for a word with Tim, and had passed on again; he had winked at one, had thrust his tongue into his cheek at another, had laughed gaily with a third; and his air said plainly enough that he took the rough with the smooth in this life, and never grumbled at the shrewd knocks of circumstances. From time to time he glanced slily at Billy Puff, and smiled a little with one side of his mouth, and mutely thanked Heaven that he, Tim o' Tab's, the stocks notwithstanding, could never look quite so scant of wit as Billy.

Very full of his morning's work was the constable; and the more he strutted up and down the square—turning now and then to bestow a lofty glance upon his captive, and blowing out his cheeks portentously—

the more he hugged himself. He had been trailed in presence of Tabitha Hirst, whom he had thoughts of making his wife, if upon due reflection he should decide that she was worthy; no longer than two days ago he had been scoffed at for sticking midway in a stile; and this was the constable's return thrust. There was more than this, too; for Tim represented all that was most dangerous and lawless in the parish; he was the apostle of poaching, gaming, cock-fighting, and all the sins that make against sobriety; it was safe at any time to lay him by the heels, for what he had just done, or for what he was about to do; but not every day did the constable catch him red-handed, as he had done this morning. So Billy Puff could not bear to go farther from his prisoner than the other end of the square; like a cat with a mouse, he was eager to play with Tim o' Tab's in his own ponderous way.

"Well, then?" said the constable, coming to a halt at two yards distance from the stocks, and blowing out his cheeks more vigorously even than was his wont. "Well, then, Tim o' Tab's, art still minded to break the laws of this realm, as by the King and Parliament established?"

"Ay," answered Tim, with shameless unconcern, "soon as iver I get my feet out o' these bonnie planks. Dost think they mak laws for nowt, Billy Puff? Nay, lad! 'Tis just for th' sport o' seeing 'em broken by men wi' spirit. Laws is like eggs—there's no meat to be getten from 'em till they're broken."

"Men with spirit!" echoed the constable, with a glance of irony.

"Ay—little, wiry chaps like myseln. Tha's getten body, lad, so be content if thy spirit *be* small as a smallish mouse-hole."

This was not at all what the constable had expected; it was his turn to laugh at Tim, surely, and he resented the other's unflagging flow of spirits under a punishment that was enough to make most men hide their heads for shame.

"An' where would tha be, Billy, if theer war no folk sich as me?" went on the culprit gaily. "Tha'd be no use at all—tha'd starve i' a ditch, if it warn't for soft-hearted lads like myseln, that frame to break th' peace now an' again just to gie thee summat to do. Why, I *keep* thee, lad; I'm ligging i' th' stocks this varry minute to addle thy bread for thee; an' it's a shameless chap 'at turns up his nose at his own bread-an'-cheese."

"Tha talks like a fooil, like a fooil," stammered the constable as he mopped his wet red brow.

"For tha knaws, Billy, weel as iver I can tell thee," said Tim, in persuasive, confidential tones, "that tha'd niver addle owt at ony other trade—save cobbling, mebbe. Tha hesn't a notion o' th' way to snare a grouse, or a pheasant, or a conie even; tha—"

"Dang thee!" cried Billy Puff, still clinging to the remnants of his dignity, "if tha hed th' whole burden o' th' King's Peace on thy shoulders, as I hev, tha'd be less lightsome i' thy talk."

From the church above, the Parson's resonant voice was dimly audible as he made forward with the service. Tim o' Tab's listened for awhile with wondrous gravity; and the terrier, seeing his head turned upward to

the churchyard for so long, moved his own head sideways—guessing there was a hare in sight, maybe—with an imitation that emphasised more ludicrously still the likeness between man and dog. The constable, seeing them both so fixed in their attention, thought that the saving grace of humility was falling on the pair of them; and he waddled three paces nearer to the stocks, prepared to take full advantage of any weakness on the other's part. Tim, however, turned a bright eye on him as he approached, and resumed the easy flow of banter which was helping so well to pass the time of durance for him.

"I'm noan for saying tha does mich for thy living, Billy—nowt save a two-three hours a day o' strutting, an' blowing out thy cheeks, an' carring behind walls for chaps 'at tha canst niver catch i' th' oppen. Nay, I would niver tak thy gooid name away, by saying 'at tha worked; all I war for telling thee—"

"Dang thee, I'll clout thy head! I'll"—cried Billy Puff, no longer able to control himself. "Leastways, I would if it were *lawful,*" he added tentatively.

"Clout away, Billy! Tha's getten a likelier chance nor tha'll see for a twelvemonth again. Eh, but tha'rt a rare plucked un! His Majesty mun hev been fearful proud when he pressed the likes o' thee into his service."

And so the dialogue went on, until the constable began to edge away, and to wonder if, after all, he had not better have left this light-tongued rascal to his own devices. Tim's high-pitched voice was plainly audible, meanwhile, during the pauses of the service, to the worshippers within the church; and twice the Squire

stirred uneasily in his pew, though he could not catch the burden of the dialogue, nor guess that Tim was undergoing penance in the market-square without.

The church was filled this morning; and there was no corner of it but seemed as intimate a part of the moor-life as the heather and the sparse green fields that shut it in. The rude building, with the mortar scarcely smoothed between its rugged blocks of stones, the oaken gallery running round three sides of it; the dark, three-storied pulpit; the farm-dogs, showing each a Sabbath face, decorous and a trifle wistful, between their master's legs—all these were as much in keeping with the moors as were the hard lean faces of the farmers, the more nicely chiselled, but still rugged, features of the gentry. And the clerk, who read the responses with a good Marshcotes burr, was himself as rough-hewn a bit of millstone grit as the walls which he regarded as his own especial property. The Squire's pew stood nearest to the chancel, and folk's eyes returned again and again, with an added sense of rest, to Barbara's slight figure and little proud-poised head—returned, too, to the Squire, whose back was stiff and straight as if it had never been bowed under weight of the midnight hours which he had spent in the loft above the Wynyates mistals. In the gallery high up above the Squire and clerk and farmer-folk, the skilled musicians of the moors added music of the fiddle, the hautboy, and the clarionet, to the sturdy voices of the congregation; and all was heart-whole and untrammelled as the wind that piped its own sweet note of praise through the wide-open door.

The psalms were finished, and again Tim's voice came shrilly from without The Squire's mastiff, Grip, stirred as uneasily as did his master; for Tim o' Tab's and he were allies of old standing. Barbara, smiling, stooped to the dog, whose head was laid against her gown.

"Quiet, lad," she whispered, smoothing his brown ears. "Dost not know that all the farm-dogs look to thee for manners?"

The mastiff glanced at her, then sank back into his place again with only the head and fore-paws showing underneath the seat; nor did he forget the family traditions again until the silence came that preceded Parson Horrocks up the narrow pulpit-stair.

The rustle of the gowns was over, the creaking of the pews as burly farmer-folk settled themselves to give the one half of their minds to Parson Horrocks, the other to the crops which knew no seventh day of rest. Everyone was waiting for the text, when Tim's voice sounded once again from the market-square, as he resumed his light-hearted banter of the constable. Grip glanced eloquently at Barbara, but she shook her head, and for the next ten minutes he wrestled with his inclination; then, seeing that his mistress was paying no heed to him, he found temptation over-strong. The pew door was unlatched, as it chanced, and before the Squire or Barbara guessed his purpose, Grip had pulled it open with one fore-foot and had walked out into the aisle. All eyes were turned to him, as he stalked down toward the door with the slow step and solemn front that witnessed to his sense of responsibility; even the Parson

smiled, as he looked down in the middle of his simple homily, and saw each moorland collie stretching out its neck to watch the mastiff, with a wistfulness that told how great their longing was to follow him. And Stephen Royd, whose eyes had never wandered far from the Squire's pew, thought that he had never seen little Barbara look so fair, as she leaned over the side of the high pew with a look of laughter in her face, and a half shame for her mastiff's lack of manners, and an impulse, quickly checked, to go in pursuit and teach him wholesome discipline.

Grip had reached Tim o' Tab's in a good hour, however; for, just as Tim was driving the constable altogether from the field, a company of roystering ne'er-do-weels came by. Had they been Marshcotes folk they would never have thought of meddling with such a common favourite as Tim; but as it was they sent up a great shout when they saw that the stocks were filled, and they ran, some one way and some another, to ransack the neighbouring houses of such eggs as they afforded. Tim, seeing them return with full hands, settled himself as comfortably as might be to await the coming trouble; nor did he bear the least malice, for a fellow-feeling told him that they were merely in search of sport of any kind, and that he chanced to come convenient to them, just as a conie, a pheasant, or a grouse, was a welcome incident to any journey of his own. None—save Parson Horrocks, perhaps—guessed what true philosophy this one-eyed rogue had gleaned from sky and field and open moor.

The constable, for his part, was smiling broadly, and

blessing these wayfarers who had come to rescue him from his enemy's too nicely-pointed wit. He had seen men under a fire of rotten eggs, and he remembered their appearance after the ordeal.

"We shall see who's th' better man," he murmured, rubbing his plump hands together. "Ay, we shall see, for sure, an'—"

He stopped on the sudden, and his cheeks whitened; for Grip, Barbara's mastiff, once he was out of sight of the congregation, had set off at a round trot in the direction of his old comrade's voice. Grip was the size of a three-months' calf, and he had that grave cast of jaw and eye which hides all hint of inner motive in a dog.

"Lord save us, we shall be swallowed whole—an' niver come to burial i' Christian soil!" cried Billy Puff forlornly.

The leader of the new-comers was just lifting a hand to throw his first egg when the mastiff reached the foot of the churchyard path, and sighted Tim, and came to him, setting a broad pair of paws on his shoulders while he licked his weather-beaten face. The philosophy that had led Tim o' Tab's to accept the ordeal tranquilly led him now to accept deliverance with equal spirit.

"Hi, lad! Grip! Set 'em!" he cried.

The mastiff obeyed; and trouble might have followed, had not Tim, from sheer kindness of heart, recalled him to his side. Then Tim o' Tab's looked round. The square was cleared, save for the burly form of Billy Puff, who was vainly striving to squeeze himself into little compass against the churchyard wall.

The mastiff had turned to exchange distant courtesies with Flick, who, after the manner of the small fry of this world, was taking unwarrantable liberties with the bigger dog.

"So," said Tim, reaching out to pat the mastiff's head, "a friend in need is a friend indeed, Grip lad. Billy Puff, come forth an' swagger; the dog shall do thee no hurt."

"I'd be easier i' my mind, I wod, if I war sure on't," murmured Billy.

"Billy Puff come forth an' learn a lesson 'at tha missed i' babbyhood. Tha'rt free, an' proud o' thy coit an' breeches; I lig here, wi' a tattered coit an' a shameless name. Ay, but dogs hev a curious scent for th' inward grace of a man; an' Grip here says, plain as noonday, 'Tim, my lad, tha'rt th' better man this day, for all thy pretty ankle-straps.' Eh, Billy Puff, tha's getten a lot to learn,—a lot to learn."

Tim finished with a sigh; but the constable had crossed to the open door of the Bull, and was already out of earshot. He was anxious to avoid the mastiff's neighbourhood; and he had, moreover, hatched a pretty scheme of torture. The bar-window of the inn looked out upon the stocks; it was open this morning, to let in the sunlight and the wind—the sunlight that was parching Tim's throat, and the wind that carried to him tantalising odours from the summer uplands. The constable, after securing a pewter-pot of home-brewed, went to the window with it, and called softly to his prisoner; then, as Tim looked round, he blew a light sea of froth towards him, and drank, and smacked his

lips. Drier and drier grew Tim's throat, and greater the fascination that drew his eyes towards the brightly burnished pewter that caught the sun-rays.

"Ay, but it's gooid to be a lawful subject—varry gooid it is, Tim o' Tab's. It goes down fair like new milk, does this tap o' home-brewed," said the constable with ponderous gravity.

Tim's heart grew exceeding sore, and his body exceeding dry, as the constable went slowly through with his quart of ale; yet to all Billy Puff's comments, and smackings of the lips, and self-congratulations, he turned a deaf ear and a seamy-coated back. He fixed his eyes instead upon the old churchyard above, where the battered headstones kept watch and ward above their graves—where the Parsonage, sturdy and grim, stood midway between this Dead Man's acre and the moor—where the flies danced in the sun-rays, and the buttercups lifted cool lips of gold to a sky of deep unalterable blue, and the wind was busy as the bees that frolicked down its path.

The Parson had preached by this time; the fiddles and hautboys were sliding into the last hymn; and by and by there came through open door and open windows the round, full psalm of thankfulness by which the Marshcotes folk replaced, one day a week, their wonted outlook on the scheme of things.

Strange pulses were stirred in Tim o' Tab's as he let the spirit of the hour creep in and master him. Old recollections claimed their due, and memories of childhood blended with the thoughts of later years. He forgot the puffy constable behind him, forgot his thirst

and the dull aching of his limbs; for the sound of Sabbath singing, which links a man to all old kindliness and peace, had found his heart for him.

"Praise God from whom all blessings flow," said the wind to the rascal, as it floated past his ears.

"Ay, begow!" he muttered; "an' praise God hev I done iver sin' I learned to net a hare. Theer's ups an' theer's downs i' life, an' none 'ud deny it—but it's a merry game enough, tak it all in all. Yond's Squire Cunliffe's voice; ye can tell it amang a thousand, so big an' hearty an' full o' sweet-smelling pride it is. Well, it's main queer about th' Squire. If th' parish knew what I knaw, they'd wonder how he keeps his head so high as he does. He taks it sorely to heart, an' all; he willun't show his hands unless he's forced to, he's fearful fond o' hiding 'em under gloves—as if his trade iver muckied hand so mich as wod let folk guess at it. Poor owd Squire! I wish I could ease th' harness a bit, that I do."

"Wilt hev a quart?" came the constable's voice from the window.

But Tim was past hearing him. "An' yond's little Mistress Barbara's thrush-note," he went on, "proud as her father's, only softer by th' half, Mistress Barbara! Eh, but theer's noan like her, I mind her when she war no higher nor a field o' oats at harvest-time. Well, well, theer's a queer mak o' summat i' a young lass—summat 'at a man cannot reckon rightly, though it twists him round an' about like a weather-cock. Lord, how her voice runs through all t'others, like a thread o' silvern water through a wood. Dang Billy Puff! I

doan't care if all th' parish sees me, saving Mistress Barbara. *Dang Billy Puff!*"

"Tha's time for a sup, lad, afore I let thee free—lots o' time," put in the constable.

Still Tim disdained reply. "I've thowt to myseln, time an' time," he murmured, as if in wonder at his own mood, "I've thowt 'at if 'th' little mistress war to look fair shamed o' me, I mud go varry nigh to living a sour sort o' respectable life, like mony another fooil i' the parish. But theer! I'm ower owd now, I've a fancy. They're coming fro' th' kirk, are they?" he broke off, as he saw the village lads and lasses, all in their Sabbath best, straggle out among the gravestones.

He glanced at Billy Puff; and the nearness of Barbara's approach, which he dreaded with peculiar weakness, moved him to humble himself for the first time before the constable—though his voice bore witness, when he spoke, how much against the grain it went to put in any plea for mercy.

"Billy," he said, "wilt let me go free afore th' folk come down fro' th' kirk?"

The constable swelled with recovered pride of capture. "Niver," he cried. "Tha'rt theer to show 'em what a wise thing, as weel as a godly, it is to go to kirk o' Sunday i'stead of running into mischief."

Tim pleaded no more; but his head was not held so high now, and there was growing apprehension in his glance as he saw a fine figure of a man come out from the church porch—a tall, straight-standing man, in a cut-away green coat, a silken waistcoat, and a shirt

that was frilled with a nice regard to its wearer's fastidiousness. Tim, looking at him, was struck afresh by the old Squire's gallant bearing; Sunday mornings seemed always to make a new man of him, to smooth the creases from his face and to show him to the world for what he was—a prosperous, upright gentleman, whose duty and whose pride alike it was to lead the parish. Little Barbara was on his arm, and his grey head was bent toward her, a little, in deference to her height, as she talked laughingly of the mastiff's recent escapade and threatened Grip with her severe displeasure.

The Marshcotes and Ling Crag folk had a keen sense of birth, and as keen a reluctance to admit it by any outward sign of speech or manner. Yet the old Squire was even nearer to their hearts than was their love of independence; they knew him through and through—knew him to be modest as a child in himself, yet full of a wondrous stiff and simple pride, down-handed by the long line of honest-dealing Cunliffes who had gone before him. He knew every neighbour, and every neighbour's bairn, by name, and had a word for each; he could grieve at their sorrow and be glad with them in time of prosperity; he was, moreover, Barbara's father—and was not Barbara the wonder and the worship of the parish? So it fell about that a lane was formed this morning, according to habit, on either side of the flagged path that led from the church door to the Bull; women curtseyed as the Cunliffes, father and daughter, passed them; and men, who had no time

for manners six days of the week made shift to doff their hats.

"Well, neighbour Haggas, can you grumble at the weather God has given us to-day?" said the Squire, as a burly farmer touched a forelock to him.

"Nay, nay, Squire—save that th' tummits is sadly dry for want of a sup o' rain."

"I care nothing at all for your turnips, Mr. Haggas," said Barbara, turning to him with a pretty smile, "the weather is under my charge to-day, and there is not going to be a single drop of rain."

"Fie, fie, little Barbara! The weather in your charge? Heresy, rank heresy—and plain truth, too, for it would be hard weather indeed that refused to do your bidding," chimed in Parson Horrocks, who had hastily cast off gown and bands and had joined the Squire with a view to their customary bottle of port at the Bull.

The gentry of the parish followed. Stephen Royd, who never felt the hand of trade so grimy on him as on these Sabbath mornings, and who, from growing habit, stood aloof from his fellows, watching friends give greeting to one another and lovers make their whispered assignations, all with the dispassionate glance of one who is shut off as by a wall from human sympathy. Close after Royd came Bancroft of the Heights, with a jaunty step and a glance that challenged all the country lasses as he passed them; and after him came other gallants, in yellow, buff, or snow-white waistcoats, with well-turned thighs and calves

that showed to full advantage under their tight knee-breeches and silken hose. But no forelocks were touched, save to Squire Cunliffe—to the Squire, and to little Barbara, in her frock of muslin, waisted high, with her laughing face set like a flower beneath her hat of Leghorn straw.

Barbara had fallen behind her father now, after giving her place beside him to Parson Horrocks; and all three of them moved so slowly between the country-folk that it seemed they would never be through with giving and exchanging greetings. The gallants of the moorside came meanwhile to lift their beavers to Barbara, who was the toast of every wine-party, and she met them with a pretty friendliness that yet was instinct with a certain self-withdrawal. And now and then she turned alike from friends of her own station, and friends beneath it, to snatch a troubled glance at Royd, who stood the one solitary figure in the churchyard.

Then, after the gentry had passed, the folk closed in across the wide-flagged path, and the second business of the day began. Prayer was over, and gossip followed; and the slowness of old days was in the people's tongues and in their lazy movements. A touch of sobriety held rollick and jest in check, as was seemly on the Sabbath day; the farmers, split up into chattering groups, would not bargain outright for a beast or a sheep, but hinted darkly that, if the Lord spared them, they would hold to such and such a bid to-morrow morn.

"There's yond dappled beast o' mine," Farmer Hag-

gas was saying to a neighbour; "if it warn't Sunday, what would'st gi'e for her?"

"Well, now—I reckon nowt so mich o' th' beast. What would I gi'e? Well, happen eight pun ten—if it warn't Sunday."

"Mak it nine pun ten—supposing it to be a weekday, like."

"Nay, nay, nine pun is all I'd gie; not a step further."

"Wilt be i' th' same mind to-morn?"

"Ay, if I'm living."

Their hands met, and the summer's day had a new crispness for both of them, since each was sure that he had got at least a pound the better of the other.

The churchyard, indeed, was at this hour the centre of the parish, in no other corner of the moors did so many folk of different occupations, different degrees of wealth, meet all together; and it was here, more than at market or in the busy week-day street, that men like Stephen Royd could see how stealthily, yet how surely, the new ways were stepping in beside the old. Farmer Haggas and his group—florid men, big in the beam—followed no trade but husbandry, and thrived on it; then there were smaller farmers, who looked equally to tillage and to manufacture for their livelihood; and behind all these again were knots of folk who stood retired as Royd himself—folk who glanced often at the Master of Hazel Mill, and talked together in low tones. These were the combers whose all depended upon trade; and they were discussing, as Royd knew, neither the weather nor the crops, but the

ever-growing rumours of a strike. One class alone was scarcely represented here—the weavers of the parish, who found times grievous hard during this glad spring weather, and who shrank from meeting their neighbours in such threadbare garb as they could muster.

Royd's brows were drawn together as he watched the combers, and listened to scattered fragments of their talk. Day by day this question of the strike grew more serious, more absorbing to him. It was not enough that he could buy back the Heights; he must ride safely on the tide that was taking other men to ruin, and add a second fortune to his first, and make himself secure for good and all against the need for going back to trade. And these grave-faced fellows, with the obstinate jaws and the suspicious eyes, held his success or failure in their hands; it was they, not he, who must decide. For a moment he was troubled, watching them. They had never dared till now to look him in the face with such frank defiance; the burden of such talk as drifted past him made to the same purpose; it was plain that the storm was growing to a head, and that the next few days would settle the matter one way or the other.

He forgot all that, however, as his eyes fell on Bancroft of the Heights, who was dangling now by Barbara's side and smiling as he bowed some compliment to her. Sunday after Sunday, he had stood aloof from his equals, as he was standing now; but never before had he felt himself so clearly master of the situation. Bancroft? His right in the Royd lands was

soon to be transferred, and he might ruffle it as he would to the end of the brief chapter. And Barbara?

Ay, that was the real question. And Royd no longer felt himself master of the situation.

Nor did Tim o' Tab's, as he sat in the sun-scorched stocks, and sucked the end of his neckerchief to ease his thirst a little, and watched all the fine-plumaged folk of Marshcotes and Ling Crag bear down upon him. Before they reached the churchyard gate, however, another friend of Tim's, and a close one, came by to fill his cup of bitter.

CHAPTER X

AND HOW THE WIND GREW SORROWFUL

TABITHA HIRST, on her way from chapel, stopped at sight of Tim, and her strong black brows were raised in a fashion that he understood. Then she moved forward along the church side of the street, and Tim watched her, knowing—without confessing it to himself—that the moment was one to test her staunchness once for all. If she were all he thought her—and he had no real doubt of it—she would not pass him by with a toss of the head, but would acknowledge him in spite of the stocks and his disgraceful plight. Billy Puff, standing at the bar-window with his empty pewter in his hand, was likewise watching her; and he was sure that she would pass him by. To his surprise, however, Tabitha, after walking almost past with head averted, turned suddenly about, and stepped with heightened colour to the stocks.

"Gooid-day, Tim," she said. "It's a queer place we meet in, choose what."

"Tabitha," he answered gravely, "I trust we'll niver meet i' a war spot."

"We couldn't weel, I'm thinking."

Her voice was quiet, but Tim knew that she meant to give him a "piece of her mind." He was overjoyed

in consequence to hear Billy Puff come unwittingly to his assistance.

"He's a poor un to look at, Tabitha, an' that's truth," said Billy, with vast self-complacency. "It all comes o' breakin' th' laws o' this realm as by King and Parliament established. I telled him how it wod be—I telled him—"

Tabitha turned upon Billy Puff instead of Tim; and she was glad to do so. "Shame on thee!" she cried.

"Shame on me?" echoed Billy woefully. "Well if iver! I allus did say theer war nowt went on two legs so queer as a wench!"

"An' isn't it shame, I'd like to knaw, to put such as him into th' stocks?"—with a side-glance at Tim which he acknowledged by a look of great self-righteousness. "Tim's fond of his marlaking, Billy Puff, but he's done nowt 'at wod warrant his being clapped i' th' stocks."

"Theer!" cried Tim, "what did I tell thee, Billy Puff? Tabitha says I've done nowt, an' th' mastiff says I've done nowt, so what's th' use o' keeping me here?"

"I didn't say ye done nowt," Tabitha put in tartly. "If I war axed, I should say ye'd made a fooil o' yourseln, Tim o' Tab's; it's a trick that comes nat'ral to th' men, I've noticed."

And with that she was gone, leaving Tim in doubt as to whether he were glad or sorry she had found him there. He had little leisure for reflection, though, as another glance up the churchyard path told him. The Squire was nearly at the gate already, and he could see Barbara's white gown not far behind.

"Eh, but I wish I war i' another spot!" muttered Tim o' Tab's, and again he braced himself to meet the last indignity which this disastrous day had brought on him.

The constable set down his empty mug, and came out again into the square; for this was to be the moment of his triumph. One glance he gave toward the churchyard, to assure himself that his audience was already gathering, and then he struck the attitude which to his thinking, best suited his character as King's representative. There was many a worse man, indeed, than Billy Puff in Marshcotes, but a vainer did not live within its borders. Standing off a little from the stocks, he surveyed his captive with an air of lofty and sorrowful surprise, and his plump red cheeks swelled rounder every moment, for pride that the gentlefolk should see what a clever fellow he had shown himself to-day.

"Where has that dog of mine gone?" the Squire was saying, as he and Parson Horrocks moved slowly down toward the Bull. "I have never known him so uneasy as he was during service. I fear me, Parson, your sermon was over-long for him."

"Why, there he is, keeping guard over some rascal in the stocks," said the Parson, pointing with his cane.

Squire Cunliffe glanced once at the occupant of the stocks, then turned his head away; and there was the same look in his grey eyes that had been there when he met Tim o' Tab's not long ago, down by Water Lane.

The Parson rattled on, meanwhile, not noticing anything amiss in his old friend's bearing.

"Bless me, Cunliffe, it is that graceless scamp, Tim, for whom we all have a good word," he broke off presently.

"Even at Petty Sessions," said the Squire, with a half-hearted laugh.

"Ay, even at Petty Sessions. This is yond fool the constable's work. Why on earth should Billy Puff choose just poor Tim to put into stocks on a sweltering day like this?"

Tim o' Tab's, the mastiff, and the terrier—three misdemeanants seated side by side—eyed Parson and Squire as they approached the stocks. The Parson stopped point-blank, the Squire with a certain hesitation. Tim saluted, and looked the most guileless man in Marshcotes, while the mastiff seemed uneasy, as if he expected insult to be heaped once again upon this friend of his; for Grip was loyal to the Squire only in the third degree, and Barbara and Tim o' Tab's each had a prior claim on his affection. Only the Parson and the constable seemed at their ease, and the latter showed in every line of his face the pride he had in showing his prisoner to two Justices of His Majesty's Peace.

"Was it for this I christened thee Timothy?" said Parson Horrocks gravely, with a poke of his cane to emphasise each word. It was a jest which had done yeoman service in the past, and the Parson was faithful to it still. "Had not the parish, Timothy, shortened

thy name to Tim o' Tab's, thou hadst never come to this. What hast thou done, thou erring sheep, on this blessed Sabbath morn, that the stocks should claim thy legs?"

Tim o' Tab's winked—very slightly—with the one eye left him. But the Parson eyed him still with sorrowful gravity.

"Done?" said Tim; "nay, ask Billy Puff yonder. Ony stick is gooid enow to beat a dog wi',"—with a sly glance from Billy to the mastiff,—"so Billy, bein' fain to hev a wench who willun't look at him, an' thinking she like as she hes a leaning my way—Billy cars behind a wall, heving seen me cross th' moor wi' a mate. We had a disputation, like, my mate an' me, an' to settle it I says, 'Now, lad,' says I, 'we'll niver come to owt by th' rambling round o' talk. Let's toss a ha'penny, if th' blessed King's head comes uppermost, I'm reet—if downside up, I'm wrang. That war what I said, Parson; an' t'other chap—"

"Sirs, this fellow—" began Billy Puff.

"Thee hod thy din, lad, till thy betters hev done," proceeded Tim, with a queer air of dignity which long acquaintance with the Squire had lent him. "So we tossed, Parson, me an' my mate, an' th' coin came King uppermost, an' I war reet, which I war weel aware of. Then out comes this Billy Puff, who had better hev been hearkening to thy sermon, Parson, as I've been doing."

"Yes, yes," chuckled the Parson; "it is long since I had you for a listener."

"As I war saying, he'd better hev been hearkening to ye, Parson—an' ye hev a way wi' preaching—i'stead o' breaking th' Sabbath by sich mouse-hole tricks as hiding behind walls. Well, howsiver, Billy comes out just as we'd settled our disputation. 'In th' King's name!' he says. An' I says, 'Ay, by th' King's name I war reet i' this disputation.' 'Come thee to th' stocks, rascal!' says Billy, puffing out his cheeks. 'Weel, happen I may when I've nowt better to do,' says I, an' starts to run, being a littlish sort o' chap by th' side o' girt Billy. An' then I trips wi' my foot i' a worrity clump o' ling, an' Billy sits fair a-top o' me; an' I've larned summat, Squire, this morn."

"And what is that, Tim?" asked the Squire, smiling in his stately fashion.

A very rapid glance Tim gave the Squire, to see how he was taking all this; then, "Why, 'at Billy Puff weighs twenty stone if he weighs a pund. He fair knocked th' breath out on me—an' all for settling a disputation by th' help of His Majesty's head."

"Constable, what have you to say to this?" asked Parson Horrocks, still with the gravity that fitted him like his well-made coat of black.

"I've to say, Parson," sputtered Billy Puff, who saw his triumph fading,—"I've to say 'at Tim o' Tab's is a liar. He war gaming on th' public moor, contrary to the laws o' this realm as by King and Parliament established. I did my duty by him, an' catched him after long trouble, an' set him i' th' stocks to be a warning to all and sundry evil-minded persons who—"

"And what is the term of his imprisonment?" put in Squire Cunliffe, who was well acquainted with the constable's phrases.

"Squire, it is at the constable's discretion, according to the laws of this realm as by King—"

"Just so, just so," murmured the Parson, with another sly poke at Tim's ribs; "but what is the constable's discretion? This rascal looks sadly heated and athirst; has he not suffered enough?"

"Nay, nay! Until one of the clock he must bide there, since I, the constable of this parish, hev set him theer for that length of time. Th' church-goers an' th' chapel-goers—God save these last, Parson, for misguided sinners, though some do say as they're Christians like ourselns—all th' folk mun see Tim o' Tab's i' his shame, an' despise him, an' go their ways wi' a warning."

"Well, Tim, it is a sorry Sabbath occupation for a man—this tossing half-pence for greed of gain," said Parson Horrocks. "Think on your sins, and sweat a little of the wickedness out of you, and then—"

"Ay, Parson?" queried Tim innocently.

"Come to me at the Bull Tavern, where I will talk to you for the good of your erring soul."

"An' thank'ee!" responded the rascal with alacrity; for the Parson had more than once cared for his soul's welfare at the Bull hostelry.

"Where is my daughter?" interposed the Squire. "It is time we were getting to horse. Ah, there she comes, the bonnie truant."

He was looking up the churchyard path, and his

eyes, as they dwelt on Barbara, were full of a frank pride that was not ashamed to show itself to all the world. Yet his face, as he turned again to Tim o' Tab's, grew clouded, and he sighed impatiently, and he left Barbara to follow him at her leisure into the Bull.

"What, Tim!" cried Barbara, stopping at a yard's distance from him.

Mr. Bancroft of the Heights was at her side, but now he fell back a pace or two, and wondered that this dainty girl should stoop to speech with a common ruffian in the stocks. Royd, just coming through the gate, saw the younger man's withdrawal, and a look of dry humour crossed his face, as he thought how true the action was to Bancroft's character; this constant fear of soiling clothes and manners by contact with the rougher sort was the penalty, indeed, which Dick Bancroft had to pay for that little unnamed something in which he fell short of true gentility. Royd had not come forward at all this morning—had only bowed with a coldness almost boorish—while Barbara was greeting friends and neighbours in the churchyard, but now that he saw her face, no longer self-possessed and mistress of them all, but full of her old childish grief for suffering, and anger against those who hurt her favourites, he joined her as naturally as if her gown were still a full six inches shorter.

"Tim, you're the best comber in the parish," he laughed. "What are you doing here?"

"Combing my thoughts out, maister, an' thinking what a feather-headed chap I am when all's said. Nay,

I cannot keep out o' trouble someway, though I've promised Squire times without number 'at I'd mak a new beginning, like."

The constable, meanwhile, was looking on with a face of blank dismay. Whoever had come and gone this morning, it had been the same—Tabitha Hirst, the Parson, the Squire, they had all condoled with the culprit for suffering unmerited hardship. He had laboured so long and strenuously to bring this notorious breaker of the laws to justice, and now for the second time he was the centre of the gentlefolk's attention, while he, the trusty servant of the Crown, was left in the cold background of their displeasure. He might have felt the situation less keenly, perhaps, had he known how little at his ease Tim was feeling at the moment; for little Barbara, in her high-waisted gown and silken hose and silver-buckled slippers, troubled him sorely with a sense of his own unworthiness. His coat smelt rabbity, he knew; his beard was of six days' growth; he could not even shuffle his feet about to ease his diffidence."

Barbara, however, was bent on brushing all such qualms aside. "It is a shame, Tim, to keep you here on such a summer's morning," she cried, caressing the head which Grip had reached up to her hand. "So you're here, Grip, keeping the poor fellow company? Well, then, I'll not say anything about you leaving church before the time. No, boy, no! You must not lick my hand; you'll spoil a pretty pair of gloves."

"He's a staunch un, is Grip—niver cares a rush

whether a friend's up or down," murmured Tim, with a look at Barbara that in itself was flattery.

"Tell me about it, Tim. What do they *pretend* you've done?" went on Barbara, with the same mixture of laughter and childish gravity which had drawn Royd to her side.

Tim o' Tab's, thus encouraged, plucked up heart, and shot a glance of triumph at the constable, and repeated his former story with such additions as a fertile fancy suggested; and Royd, a quiet spectator of the scene, smiled broadly when he saw how seriously Tim's tale was being accepted. Barbara's first impulse was to turn upon the constable and upbraid him for his tyranny; but a better plan suggested itself, and, instead, she tripped across to Billy Puff and in her softest tones she told him how shrewd he must have been to capture so slippery a defaulter. The constable grew larger in the bulk, and red with pride; he felt that his hour, if late, had really come at last. Then Barbara was anxious to learn how the stocks were fastened.

"Why, wi' a lock an' key, mistress, wi' a lock an' key, for sure," he answered, with fatherly condescension.

"Ah—might I see the key, constable?"

"Well, there's nowt agen th' law, I tak it, *seeing* th' key. Here 'tis, mistress."

She took it in her hand and played with it for awhile. "It looks a very rusty key," she said demurely; "I fear it will never open the stocks again, constable."

"Eh, but it will!" cried the other, smiling at her

artlessness. "Why, ye could oppen it yourseln, mistress, though ye've fingers slim as hezel-twigs."

"Do you think I could? Shall I try, constable, just to prove that you are right?"

He scratched his head perplexedly; and Barbara, not staying till his doubts were settled, slipped the key into the lock and turned it. Then she set both hands to the upper beam, but found it over-heavy for her strength.

"Stephen, will you not help me to lift it?" she cried, glancing round at him.

"Nay, nay!" stammered Billy Puff, realising what she had in mind. "I said till one o' th' clock; an' what I says, th' law says; an' to break th' law is a weighty offence agen this realm, as by King and Parliament ordained."

"But then, constable," said the little lady, in a voice of soft decision, "Tim, here, is so very hot and thirsty, and your sentence was too long."

Bancroft of the Heights stood moodily aside; he did not care to take any part in rescuing such as Tim o' Tab's, but on the other hand he resented that Royd should be appealed to, not himself.

Royd's eyes met Barbara's as he stooped to lift the heavy cross-beam. Something of his dreams of the last few days was in his glance, and Barbara, after the first silent scrutiny, could not meet it. She had surprised a live human heart in the mill-master—had surprised it during that quick and masterful glance of possession—and she could not credit that he, too, had

instincts which lay deeper than the passion to amass a fortune.

Tim was free by this time, and after he had thanked them in his own light, half-jesting way—thanks which neither of his rescuers heard—he moved away to ease his cramped limbs by walking up and down the square. A moment since Royd had been content to see Barbara as a child again, and he had laughed to see the Squire's daughter and the poacher in league against the constable; but that was gone now. He did not see the stocks, nor the grey front of the tavern, nor Bancroft's look of jealousy. He saw only Barbara,—Barbara, who was no child at all, but the woman whom he loved, and whom he needed.

"You have shunned me lately, Barbara," he said, with a new note in his voice, as if in some way he had earned the right to accuse her.

She wished to fight against the tone, but its compulsion carried her with it. "You have shunned Wynyates, Stephen, for more months than I care to count," she faltered.

"Yes—for I knew how trade was dulling me."

"It must have dulled you—to make you think—to make you think that you could find less than a welcome with old friends."

Again their eyes met. "Babs, you are not changed, then?" he said, as if the thought had escaped him unawares.

She turned sharply away and did not answer him. Yes, she was changed! But Stephen must never in

this world be told how much, and in what way the change had come. Her cheeks burned as she recalled, with cruel minuteness, every detail of that far-off night, when she had sung by candle-light the ballads that Royd loved, and afterwards had watched the moon-light filter through her chamber-window and let it read her own heart's nakedness.

"It is time we set off home. I wish you could find father for me, Stephen," she said, after a long silence. And her voice was colder even than she willed it should be.

Royd was master of himself in all that had no concern with Barbara. He had the cool judgment, the sanguine reliance upon self, which carried him forward through the mass of his more shiftless fellows; but in this one relation of his life he was as water when the wind blows on it. A moment since, and he was ripe to claim her there and then; her very coldness was proof that she knew her weakness and his strength—and yet he read it all amiss. Without his knowing it, his manner fell into the hard, set groove that Barbara knew; he was the mill-master again, and Bancroft of the Heights, waiting impatiently till he could claim a word with Barbara, had no inkling how recklessly his rival had just played into his hands.

The Squire and Parson Horrocks, as it chanced, had just concluded a ceremony as time-honoured as the church-going itself. After leaving Tim o' Tab's, they had stopped on the threshold of the Bull, as they had done these scores of Sundays past.

"Parson," said Squire Cunliffe, "I must wait until

my horse is saddled. Will you step inside with me and crack a bottle for the good of the old house?"

"Squire," answered the Parson, according to old usage, "it is early in the day for strong liquor; yet I have preached longer than my wont, and I confess to a certain dryness of the throat."

Then there was the usual grave dispute of courtesy, and each stood trying to bow the other through the doorway; until at last the Parson, reminded of his cloth, went first, and murmured that the office, not the man, claimed precedence. Amid the hot new days, and the hot new restlessness that was seeking for it knew not what, these two stood rooted in the kindlier soil of eld; and they alone, it seemed, in a world of change, neither needed nor acknowledged any change. Life had been leisurely in their youth, with a stately flavour to its intercourse; it was not altered to them, now that they neared the threshold of old age.

They moved down the passage, chatting as they went, and into the snug back-parlour that looked out upon the farmyard of the tavern. On the table stood a bottle, with the cork ready drawn, and the cobwebs on it blowing softly in the breeze that passed from open door to open window. Then the landlord bustled in, with three glasses in his hands; and his manner, no less than the surprising readiness of wine and glasses, suggested that in some way he had had premonition of the hospitality offered by the Squire a moment since at the tavern door.

"Well, Crabtree," said Squire Cunliffe, as the landlord filled his glass with a careful hand, "how is that

lusty last-born of thine? Naught amiss with him, eh?"

"Nay, Squire, nowt wrang wi' him. He kicks an' he crows, fair as if he could niver get through twirling his toes, an' his feet, an' his fat little hands. An' how fares it wi' Mistress Barbara?"

"Well, then as the little mistress is named—fill up a glass for thyself, Crabtree," said the Squire, as he had said a hundred times on the like occasion.

Crabtree, by a fortunate chance, had brought one glass too many, and he filled it with his weekly air of surprise at his guest's condescension. The Squire lifted his wine to the light, and watched its brown and ruby colours mingle with the sunshine; and then he turned to his companions, and gave the toast.

"The little mistress!" he said, with a world of tender reverence in his voice.

"God keep her," muttered the Parson, and meant it as truly as any prayer he had uttered this Sabbath day.

And again for the hundreth time, Parson Horrocks wondered why the Squire always kept his hands so scrupulously gloved—at such times as these, for instance, when other men, more foppish, would have doffed their gauntlets and been glad to do so.

"'Tis fair outrageous o' Billy Puff, this setting Tim o' Tab's i' th' stocks," ventured Crabtree presently.

"Billy Puff is—ahem!—the silliest man in Marshcotes," said Parson Horrocks testily.

"Ay, sir, these fat men are by way o' being fond, I've noticed. But to put Tim there! Why, axing your pardon, 'twould be a'most as bad to see Squire

or Parson there. An' th' lad war sore athirst. I hed th' tail o' my eye on him, an' I saw he war noan just easy, though he hed th' laugh o' Billy Puff ivery time it came to words. I hed a mind, once ower, to tak him a sup o' summat, but it's treason, they say, or summat o' that mak, an' Billy war hovering all about, when a decent-minded chap wod hev gone round th' corner an' winked for a two-three minutes."

"Well, it will be long before the constable catches Tim again, I warrant," laughed the Parson. "Get ready a chop or two, Crabtree—or a slice of the joint, say—and as much old ale as a man can carry without detriment to his head. Tim o' Tab's has earned a square meal and a well-filled pewter pot."

"Ye've getten a heart i' your body, Parson, as weel as a head on your shoulders!" said Crabtree, who rarely stooped to praise.

"Crabtree, was that my horse I heard just now?" said the Squire, who still seemed ill-at-ease while Tim o' Tab's was the topic of discussion.

"I'll run an' see, sir."

The landlord returned presently to say that the horses stood ready saddled at the door; and the two friends went out together, to find Tim o' Tab's free of the stocks, and Billy Puff standing in the background, with a puzzled, foolish smile upon his face.

"It's agen th' law, I sadly fear," the constable was saying.

Parson Horrocks took in the situation at a glance. "Constable," he said, in his gravest manner, "there is a weightier than King's law in Marshcotes parish—

and that is the will of Mistress Barbara Cunliffe. Let the prisoner go free."

"Well, Parson, I hev my doubts; but if ye say it's lawful, an' according to th' constitution o' this realm, as—"

"It is," said the Parson, with conviction. "The King himself would not deny it if he were here to see Mistress Barbara."

This with a bow that might well have shamed a younger man; for chivalry, like sound wine, takes on with age a subtler fragrance, and Parson Horrocks spent a good third of his life in devotion to Barbara's service.

"From the vanity of this wicked world, sir, you will never, I fear, deliver me," laughed Barbara, as she set her slippered foot in the Parson's hand.

Royd and Bancroft stood and watched her mount pillion-fashion behind her father; and there was little to choose between them, so far as moodiness of face went. Royd was thinking of the girl's sudden coldness a while since, and Bancroft was asking himself why this old Parson should always claim the right to lift Barbara to the saddle, just because he had done it ever since she was a child."

"I had better get me back to trade," muttered Royd.

"The Parson's an old fogey; it is time that younger men stepped in," growled Bancroft of the Heights.

"Will you ride back to dinner with us, Stephen?" said the Squire, as he gathered the reins in his hand.

Barbara sent a glance to bear her father's invitation

company,—a shy glance, which she had not meant to give,—and Royd wavered for a moment.

"I am sorry, sir, but I am pledged to-day," he answered brusquely, after a pause that was evident both to Barbara and to his rival.

The Squire, however, seemed more relieved than otherwise by the refusal. He turned to Bancroft, who was waiting for his horse and smacking his whip against his booted leg.

"Tuesday is my daughter's birthday," he said; "you sup with us that day?"

"You are kind enough to suggest it, sir."

Barbara caught a glance of understanding that passed between Bancroft and her father, and she wondered at it—wondered, too, why old custom should be so forgotten that Stephen had been invited for to-day, not for her birthday-night. It was while her thoughts were bent on this, and while her father was ending those farewells which were never less than leisurely upon a kirk-going morn, that there seemed to come a sudden chill amid the happy sunlight of the day—a sudden chill, and with it a queer note in the wind as it rose and whistled down between the graves, and dropped again as quickly as it came. The sense of cold was gone in the same moment; the sun was as warm as ever, the breeze as playful; yet Barbara's face was white, for she had learned from childhood to link this rarely-heard, peculiar sadness of the wind with an old superstition of her house. It was the note which Lavrock of the Herders Inn had heard in the winter-

time, the note of which he had told Royd when the master-weaver came to buy his wool; and Barbara doubted its meaning as little as he did. Royd stood almost at her elbow, and she saw by his face that he too had noticed what the others had let go by unheeded.

"Did you hear the old Squire hunting, Stephen?" she whispered.

"I heard the west wind piping," he answered gruffly. And she knew from his tone that now, at last, he too had felt the touch of old superstition. But she did not know that it was his growing love for her that had awakened chords of dread, long over-laid by the bustle and the workaday routine of mill-life; nor could she guess that he read signs of a disaster soon to come into the Squire's invitation to Bancroft of the Heights.

One last look Barbara gave him—of inquiry, almost of entreaty—and then she and her father were cantering toward the moors along the narrow silent street.

Royd was left facing Bancroft of the Heights, while the ostler, holding their horses ready bridled, wondered why they stood in such evident embarrassment instead of getting to saddle. Each was measuring the other with a glance that had in it as little courtesy as kindliness. Bancroft was thinking of all that supper invitation meant, of Barbara's riches and her beauty; Royd was trying to forget the wind's note lately heard among the gravestones, and telling himself that he held this well-groomed ruffler's pride in the hollow of his hands. For a long moment their scrutiny lasted; and then they turned without a word and sought their horses.

The Squire and Barbara were riding meanwhile with a silence no less deep between them.

"What ails you, child?" he asked abruptly, when Ling Crag village lay behind them and still Barbara had not spoken.

It was not natural to Barbara to hide anything, and the words came clumsily. "I? Why, nothing, father. I was—was thinking of poor Tim, who never did wrong to anyone, being set there in the stocks. He—he is almost one of the Cunliffe family, is he not? seeing how much he comes into our life at Wynyates."

The Squire in turn was silent for awhile. Then, "Well, as to that," he answered, in a voice that was as little natural as Barbara's own, "as to that, he does sad harm, I fancy, to the game upon my land."

"No, not yours," she interposed, really solicitous now for Tim's good character. "You know, father, that Tim would never take a blade of grass that was reared on the Hall land."

"Well, it may be so—it may be so. Perhaps it is only the game of other men that Tim is partial to."

There was a sort of compunction in the Squire's tone, as if it went against the grain to wrong the ne'er-do-weel by a single untrue word.

"And then he is so much better than they make him out to be. You know, father, what Stephen says about the combed wool that he takes to the mill each week. If he were really idle, as folk say he is, how could he comb the wool?"

The Squire pulled his nag into a less slumberous pace. "Ay, there is something in that," he said slowly.

"Tim, though, tells the villagers that the brownies comb it for him while he is busy in the fields o' nights."

"That is Tim's jest. He would make a jest of anything in the world—himself and his own good qualities first of all."

"Maybe, maybe. I confess to a weak-knee'd fondness for Tim, myself. Barbara, have you noticed Stephen Royd of late?"

Barbara hid her head a little, though she was secure behind the Squire's broad back. "Why should I have noticed him, father? He seems out of humour with his friends, does he not?"

"How like a maid! First to know nothing; then, all in a breath, to hit the right nail on the head. He does seem out of humour, and it troubles me. Have I said too much against this cursed wool-trade, think you? He was inclined to plead a prior promise to-day, I fancied, where none existed."

"I sometimes think," she began, and was so long in finishing that the Squire looked round impatiently.

"What do you think, child?" he asked.

"That Stephen hates all trade as much as you do, and that you fret him now and then because he feels your enmity to it is true—"

"God forbid! I would fret no man who shared my hospitality—and Stephen least of all, though nowadays he seems to have no thought for anything but wool. Have I really hurt him, think you, Barbara?"

"And if you have?" said Barbara, with a sudden change of front. "Why should he think that all the

world approves of him? We are almost home, father; I wonder, are we late for dinner?"

Tim o' Tab's was at the moment seated in the kitchen of the Bull; nor did he find much pity for himself, whatever compassion little Barbara was feeling for him.

"Th' Parson preaches a rare sermon—o' hot roast beef an' mellow ale," said Tim o' Tab's to Crabtree of the Bull, as he finished a liberal helping.

"Th' Parson, I'd hev ye knaw," answered Crabtree oracularly, "th' Parson is th' best man i' Marshcotes—after Squire an' Mistress Barbara."

"Ay," said Tim, with a sharp glance at the landlord, "after Squire an' th' little mistress. An' if all were knawn about th' Squire that is to be knawn—"

"Well?" asked Crabtree, pricking up his ears in his slow way.

"Ye'd knaw summat. Thank ye, I'll tak a slice o' th' puddin'—nobbut a middling slice, mind ye, for I've well-nigh etten enough."

Tim fell silent then; for his thoughts kept wandering to old Squire Cunliffe.

"He mun hev his bottle o' port," he was saying to himself; "ay, he war niver one to show less nor his own proud self when he's abroad. What th' price o' a bottle is, I dunnot knaw; but he'll hev it o' th' best, that's sartin sure, an' th' half of a silver crown willun't pay for't. To think o' that, an' him— Nay, I willun't think on't! I can do no gooid, an' I shall nobbut spoil rare vittals if I go sorrowing ower the troubles of other folk!"

CHAPTER XI

UNREST

THE Friendly Inn at Ling Crag was doing a brisk trade this morning; for it was Monday, and the long row of wool-packs that lined the tavern-front would have told what day it was with as much certainty as the almanac. If old habit went for anything, moreover, a native could have foretold that the packs would stay there until late afternoon. It was, indeed, the weekly Parliament of the village, and there were few among the combers who failed to stop for glasses at the Friendly after taking their combings to the mill and returning with the next week's wool. The village, quiet for six days out of the seven, took on a holiday aspect at such times, and while the men discussed their weighty rustic politics within doors, the maids and matrons of Ling Crag foregathered round about their cottage-doors, and robbed the absent of their good repute, and told what weddings might be heard of soon.

There was every type of face in the crowded tap-room—the pinched features of the shiftless father of twelve, who had never kept his threshold to himself, as the saying is, but who had always seen want staring at him from the doorway—the round, red face of the man to whom work and victuals came with equal relish

—the sly face of the poacher, with that alert look in the eyes which in itself was enough to convict him of the double trade. Outwardly all was as usual; the ale was dwindling in the tavern barrels, the sun was creeping westward behind the village chimney-stacks, and tongues were tripping on a looser rein than they had done awhile since; yet in some undefined way there was a quieter air, as of restraint, over the knot of men. And presently a silence fell on them, and each man looked at his neighbour, and the shiftless sort began to scrape their boots among the sodden heaps of sawdust on the floor. A great, blunt-headed fellow—Eli Shackleton by name—sat in the window-niche; and he it was who first broke the silence.

"Well?" he said, in a deep voice.

That was all; but the monosyllable suggested a world of surmise, expectation, talk, and it loosed men's tongues.

"Ay, ye may weel axe," cried one of the crowd. "Times show no signs o' bettering, an' th' only chaps on th' moorside who can addle ony brass are th' maister-weavers."

"An' they addle too mich, an' it's us as fills their pockets," put in Eli Shackleton. "Eh, lads, but we're bonnie fooils to do't."

"Stuff an' nonsense!" cried Tim o' Tab's, who had slipped quietly in among them just as Shackleton gave out his pregnant "Well?"

"Oh, it's ye, Tim, is't?" said Shackleton, trying to frown him down. "Well, we know thy tale, lad, an' we like as we doan't reckon as mich on't as we did."

"That nobbut shows ye've stuffed more feathers into your silly heads," Tim answered pleasantly. "See ye, now—ye're all Maister Royd's hands here this morn? Well, ye should think shame to grudge him, or ony like him, th' brass he's warked for—ay, an' warked honest. If ye'd belanged to Booth o' Goit Miln, now—"

"They're birds o' a feather, an' thick as thieves," asserted Shackleton, bringing his great fist down upon the window-ledge with a blow that set the geraniums, the fuchsias, and the mauve petunias all rattling in their pots. "What, didn't I see 'em yestermorn—Booth an' Stephen Royd—wi' their heads shoved close together? They were bartering, I reckon—bartering ower what we addle for 'em, wi' our sweat an' our empty bellies, an' our childer crying for bread."

He had touched the true note there—the note which no set oratory could have sounded. A hoarse murmur greeted him, a murmur that had as little articulate form in it, and as deep a meaning, as the growl of hunger-driven brutes. By the hearth stood a little, sallow man, with restless eyes and the sort of face that is thin to wedge itself into other people's business; he was the accredited mouthpiece of the Bradford strikers, and had come up here with plain orders, and a firm resolve that he would persuade the Ling Crag folk to join them; but even he kept silence, for he saw that the yeast of discontent was fairly brewing now, and that Eli Shackleton must be the leader for the nonce of men who acknowledged few prophets within the boundaries of their parish, but none outside it.

The murmurs grew articulate at last; tales of want,

tales of cruelty, tales of stark lewdness in the factories, were told in the blunt, unstudied words of fact. And Stephen Royd, now that their blood was up and their reason in abeyance, was made to bear the brunt of all; cruelty and want, the sobbing of the little children and the tearless desperation of the women—the mill-masters stood at the head and front of all these matters, with the overlookers. whip in hand beside them. There could be no distinction now; Royd's gentler dealings were forgotten—he was a master; he had shared the masters' past prosperity; he must share with them in what the future held.

The sallow man on the hearth looked on, and nodded quietly as he saw these stolid folk grow quick with passion. They had been slow—ay, but they would be sure if once they let the strike-fever lay a firm hold on them. And by and by, when he judged that it was time, he put a question to them—not with his usual flow of words, his thunder of denunciation and restless cry for action, but in a quiet, matter-of-fact tone that witnessed to his knowledge of men's hearts.

"So ye'll strike, friends?" he said.

"No!" cried Tim o' Tab's, true to the last to Stephen Royd.

"Ay, will we!" roared Eli Shackleton.

And, "Ay, will we!" came the answering shout. And even Tim o' Tab's despaired as he heard the underlying depth and fury of that shout; it would need a miracle now, he told himself, to avert what Royd had worked so pluckily and so untiringly to avoid.

Shackleton, glancing at the window, gave a low

laugh, and the shouting died down as one and all followed the direction of his finger.

"What is't, Eli?" they cried.

"It's th' overlooker down at Royd's miln," said Shackleton grimly. "He's chosen an unchancy road this Monday mornin', I'm thinking."

They understood him; passion had knit them close together for the moment, and their minds, usually so tardy of approach, ran together, and met, and were as one. In a moment half a dozen of them had run out into the road; in another they were back again, with the overlooker struggling in their grasp. It was unjust enough, as it chanced; no whip was ever used in Hazel Mill, and Royd had dismissed overlooker after overlooker for cruelties privily committed, until at last he had found one who was able to err upon the side of gentleness. It was unjust, and the victim, as he struggled with his captors, kept asking what he had done to merit such harsh treatment; but his face was white as he glanced from one to another of the combers—for he knew that, like Royd himself, he was going to suffer for the shortcomings, not of himself, but of his class.

"Theer's a feather-bed, I'll warrant, up aboon-stairs," said Eli Shackleton quietly; "an' theer's tar to be had for the axing somewhere."

A laugh went up—no kindly laugh, but one that had a sting in it, as of a blow. A man pushed forward through the press, and set his hand about the overlooker's throat; and he had no laugh upon his lips, for

he had lately lost a daughter at a factory-master's hands.

"Gi'e me my lass again!" he cried. "Gi'e me my lass again!—she ligs i' Sorrowful Water, drowned for shame—"

They pulled him off; for they had not come to the pitch of murder yet, and a glance at the comber's face was enough to show his purpose—enough to show, too, what streams of bitterness, of squalor and despair, had been running high and higher still between their banks during these spring weeks of sun and western winds and growing meadow-grass. The devil was loose among them now; murder would show a face more comely by and by, and meanwhile they were ready for any sort of lighter cruelty. Three big fellows had already tugged a bedding from the upstairs room, and were slitting the seams with their clasp-knives; the feathers were already blowing hither and thither in the draught; and the overlooker had his hands across his eyes, for he had listened more than once to talk of what this tarring and feathering meant to the victim—this rough-and-ready punishment which, if it moved the bystanders to mirth, was a very real torture to the victim. Tar would be forthcoming soon—the landlord said there was a barrel in his yard—and only Tim o' Tab's had any plea to offer for the overlooker.

"Let him go, ye fooils! Bide till ye get hod o' Booth o' Goit Miln, an' theer'll be a bit o' sense in't," he cried. "What's th' use o' making a grey gander out o' a honest man?"

It was rarely that the combers would not let this shrewd and happy-go-lucky Tim point them to the light side of any matter; he had, moreover, the reputation of being a "luck-bringer," and they attached a weight to his advice which was not always to be measured by its merits; but to-day they were past all that, and they turned with a snarl on Tim.

"Best keep thy tongue fro' wagging till we've done what mun be done," said Shackleton roughly. "This chap stands for Stephen Royd, an' for Booth o' Goit Miln, an' he's getten to pay a tidy price."

"An' happen we'll leet on Royd hisseln afore so varry long," put in another.

"Ay, an' what then?" retorted Tim undauntedly. "Begow, I'd weel like to be theer—for I've seed Maister Royd stand up to his man, an' it's a seet that warms your belly."

Royd, as it chanced, was riding up from Marshcotes at the moment on business that was waiting for him at Goit Mill; and his thoughts, like the combers', were busy with the ever-present question of the strike. Not long since he had told Parson Horrocks that the danger was nearly over-past; but the Bradford men, being out of work themselves, had found more time of late to cross to Marshcotes and Ling Crag; they had talked, argued, threatened; and now the reports which Tim o' Tab's brought to Hazel Mill, as to the temper of the workmen, grew uglier day by day. Anxiety was written plainly on the master-weaver's face as he turned the corner of the hill and saw the swarthy Ling Crag houses reaching sky-wards; obstinacy, too, and a cer-

tain relish for the very difficulties which threatened his prosperity. For this strike meant more to him than any of his well or evil-wishers guessed; it meant money, and with money the freedom to leave trade for ever, the power to give his land-love what it craved. For, when he left business for good and came back to the old home, he meant to come with capital; there must be no parsimony, no need to reckon up the cost of bringing back his fields to the sweetness and the savour they had lost during the shiftless reign of the Bancrofts, father and son. None knew better than Stephen Royd what an outlay this would mean; and again he told himself, as he topped the rise and trotted through the Ling Crag street, that there must be no strike at Hazel Mill. He checked his horse as he neared the Friendly Inn and saw the wool-packs, row on row, that lined the front. It was past noon now, and the combers must have been here since the early morning; and Royd knew, as well as if he stood within the bar and listened to them, that they were neither gossiping nor jesting, but talking of the strike. Then it was borne in on him that the crisis had come, that he must stand or fall by the issue of this tap-room meeting; and he did not mean to wait idly until these folk should come to their decision. With the promptness that had stood him in good stead at many a dangerous corner of the trade-road, he slipped from the saddle, tied his bridle to the ring, and went indoors. There were wilful men among the combers, and men who upon due provocation could set their faces to a flint-like hardness; but the most wilful of all the tavern's guests that day, and the hard-

est of face, was the master-weaver, whose eyes saw only that long low house upon the hiil which was to be the prize of this unlooked-for meeting.

They had piled the feathers into a heap by now, and Eli Shackleton, as he twisted the overlooker round and about in his hairy hands, was calling loudly for the tar, and bidding the bystanders help him to get off the victim's clothes. They turned as Royd came through the open door, and he read at a glance that their temper was uglier than he had looked for; yesterday, after morning service, they had scowled and muttered at him in the Marshcotes graveyard; but not as openly as now, nor with such heart in it. He watched them steadily for awhile, and Tim's patch-eyed terrier, always alive to a sense of his own paramount importance, came up to lick his hand. Tim himself said nothing, but there was a quiet look of humour in his face as he saw Royd's eyes go round from one to another of the group, and rest at last upon Eli Shackleton and the frightened overlooker

"What do you want with my overlooker, Shackleton? I sent him to Ling Crag on business that won't wait," said Royd.

"We're bahn to gi'e him a taste of combers' overlooking; t'other business mun wait, I reckon," answered Shackleton.

Tim, still watching with keen zest, could see the old Royd stuff come clear and crisp through the mask which the master-weaver had laboured to fashion for himself—could see his master's muscles stiffen, and

hear the lusty ring to which his voice had long been stranger.

"Take your hands off!" Royd commanded.

"Begow, but they wanted th' maister here!" chuckled Tim. "An' now they've getten him—an' we shall see summat, or I war niver born at Benty Farm."

"It's ower late," said Eli Shackleton, with a frank stare of defiance at Royd; "a week sin' we mud hev hearkened to your masterful ways, Royd o' Hazel Miln —but that's owered wi' for gooid an' all."

Royd put the crowd aside with his right hand and his left, and stood in front of Shackleton. "Take your hands off!" he repeated.

"Not for ye; nay, I reckon not for ye."

Big men both, and men of their hands, they stood for a moment eye to eye; and then Royd shot out his fist, and caught the comber on the chin and dropped him.

"Clean an' sweet," murmured Tim o' Tab's approvingly. "I've a fancy th' maister hes ta'en th' best way to settle a strike, though he doesn't knaw it, happen."

Shackleton lay where he had fallen, and at another time Royd might well have feared for the effect of his too well-directed blow; but he cared for nothing at the moment, except the knowledge that his combers stood all together here, and that he had his chance to talk to them. They were not growling now, nor eyeing him askance; interest in a fair and equal fight had taken them unawares, and a low cry of applause had gone up

when Royd showed himself the master in more than name. Not long since Eli Shackleton had spoken of their wrongs, and he had struck a deep chord in every man of them; but Royd had touched a deeper. No logic, no persuasiveness, could have reached them with half the force that one quick blow, with nerve and muscle behind it, had effected; the argument was final to their minds, and the Bradford strikers might resign themselves to the knowledge that Hazel Mill at least would still continue working. Royd did not know this, however, as he turned and looked steadily from man to man; he only wondered that the faces which a moment since had scowled at him should now be turned to him with respect, and almost with good-humour.

Yes, he was one of them. He was rich, and they were poor; he was gently born, and the nameless air which land, and only land, can give a man raised a class-wall between himself and them; yet he was one of them, and never had he shown it as he did this morning, as he stood with his feet among the musty sawdust and the beer-stains, and measured their strength, and flung himself against them, will against stubborn will. The late fight was less than nothing to him—a bit of lad's play interfering with grave business—and by this time he had forgotten the man who lay behind him, forgotten the overseer who, still sick from his late terror, was trying to stammer out his gratitude. *This* was the fight; and instinctively he squared his shoulders and put his right foot forward.

"I came in because I saw your wool-packs standing

at the door, and knew you were talking of the strike," he said.

"Well, an' so we war," admitted one.

"Fool's talk, all of it. I can tell you—ay, word for word—what you were saying. First, that Stephen Royd was putting money in his pockets that should be feeding your children and your wives. How far would it go, and how long would it last, and where would you find work when you had beggared the very man who could provide it for you?"

The man who had lost a daughter, drowned for shame in Sorrowful Water, was the only one to answer. "Ye're wifeless an' childless, Royd o' Hazel Miln, an' ye cannot understand it. When ye've heard th' childer —*your own childer*—come crying to your knee for bread, ye care nowt for who belangs th' brass, an' nowt for what's to come at after, so ye can nobbut stop their crying for th' one day an' neet."

"I've neither wife nor child," said Royd, in a hard voice; "and if I had, I'd keep them with my own hands and my own wits, and not go asking any charity, under the name of fair wages, from the masters who have earned their money."

The words were rough, and the rough folk who nodded half in approbation recognised that there was shrewd sense in them. Again the dead girl's father was the only one to mutter; and Royd, on his part, could not guess how bitterly his words struck home in this one case.

"See you," he went on, in a different voice, "you

think we masters like to see you starving; you think we could help it if we would. How can we, any more than we can help the cold winds at shearing time or hail when the corn is up? Bad times are bad times, and neither you nor I can alter them—except to make them worse by stopping labour altogether."

"Ye can gi'e a fair wage, an' theer'll be no work stopped," put in Royd's persistent adversary.

"When I get a fair price for my pieces—when times are good, that is—I share it with you. Come, lads, have I dealt well with you in times gone by? Have I lowered your wages even now when the pinch has come?"

They had liked Royd, had even sung his praises, in old days; and now they were recalling this with greater and greater clearness.

"We've nowt agen ye that way," said one slowly, "but, maister, it fair sticks i' our gizzards, an' that's truth, to think o' our little uns i' th' factories, an' to knaw what's done theer, an' yet to see ye swopping brass wi' them that's harder i' th' heart nor ye can understand."

"Hiram Lee, ye do a bit of farming, if I remember, as well as combing," said Royd drily. "Well, when ye bargain for a beast, do ye go asking all about the man, who wants to buy,—if his heart is in the right place, and if he treats his wife and family fairly, and so forth?"

"Nay, begow!" chuckled Hiram Lee. "I put my teeth into his brass, an' I count it three times ower, an' then, if it bites weel an' counts fair—why, I button

a breeches'-pocket ower it, an' thank th' Lord for one more gooid bargain driven."

"And so do I," said Royd.

He could have got nearer still to the hearts of all these folk, he could have told them, in good faith, that he was more intimate with their hardships and their sorrows than they guessed—that the crying of the children rang as loudly in his ears as in theirs—that he, too, was eager to see swept away all wrongs that could be righted—all wrongs, that is, which were of men's making, and not due to those trade tides which were as shifting and as little to be resisted as the sea itself. He could have opened his mind to them on these matters, and have profited by such candour; but he would not stoop to it; he would not say one word that should turn their minds in any way against such brother-masters as Booth of Goit Mill. Booth, like himself, had to fight this battle of the looms, and he should fight it squarely, without side-thrusts from his rival.

A silence fell between them; the men's eyes were still fixed on Royd, and none noticed that Eli Shackleton had half-lifted himself from the floor, and was looking about him in a stunned, surprised way.

"Maister Royd, theer's nobbut a hair 'twixt sense an' fooilishness—but I fancy ye're i' th' right this time," said a comber, breaking the pause.

The sallow man by the hearth, who until a few moments since had watched the unrest growing surely to a head, saw now that Royd was carrying his people with him.

"In the right, is he?" he broke in angrily. "Seems to me he's giving you talk, and plenty of it—but what does it come to, men? He'll give you nothing else—nothing to make bread and meat of—and it's meat and bread you want, for your starving wives and your crying children."

He tried to touch the same chord in them that Shackleton had done; but it was too late for that. As for Royd, he was buoyant; the reins were in his hands, and he knew it; and the strained look left his face as he turned quickly round to answer this new adversary.

"I'm thinking I've heard of you," he said. "You come from Bradford, and you try to show Ling Crag folk how to manage our own affairs. You're the only man in this room who isn't Ling Crag born and bred —and the only one who wants to see us starve, masters and men together."

The combers growled approval; for again Royd had shown his knowledge of their tempers, and by ranging himself as a Ling Crag man, he had insensibly shut off the agitator from their sympathy. This man from Bradford who at the outset had shown himself a sympathiser with their grievances, was now a foreigner, and his least actions were to be looked on with suspicion.

"You've a tongue in your head," said the stranger savagely, "and you can turn these Ling Crag fellows round your finger, so it seems. But they'll know one day, as I know now, how far you're friendly to them. They're workers, and I'm a worker, and your hand's against us, Royd of Hazel Mill, however you try to soap us down with speech."

One or two seemed moved by this last effort of the agitator's; but Royd silenced him once for all, so far as Ling Crag was concerned.

"*You* a worker!" he cried. "Did you ever lift your hand to comb or shuttle in your life? Not you. I know you, and I know your history; and if any man has wife or children starving, let him go see your house in Bradford. How do you live? How do your children live? Better than I do myself. Times are hard, you say; then where does your money come from? We masters don't feed you; you won't work to feed yourself; how do you get money to provide wheaten bread, and meat twice a day, and clothes that are too good to work in?"

He paused, but the stranger had no answer ready, nor would he meet Royd's gaze.

"How do you live, I ask?" went on the master-weaver. "Why, on the alms of better workers than yourself; you're a beggar, thriving on the discontent you rouse,—a fellow who creeps into honest houses, and whines about hard times, and gets well paid for it. You've had much to say of me in Ling Crag; well, if I lost every penny to-day, I could turn to the loom, or to the combing-pot, and earn my bread as well as any man who stands here. But could you? If there were no fools to listen to you, would you thrive or starve?"

"He'd starve, begow! an' I'm capped we niver saw it i' that light," cried a big voice from the window.

It was Eli Shackleton who spoke—Eli, who had recovered, so it seemed, from the effects of a hard blow,

and who was eyeing Royd with a look of mingled sourness and approval.

"What, you're on your legs again?" laughed Royd, with a quick turn of the head. "Do you bear me a grudge, Eli, or must we settle our quarrels by and by in some quiet spot?"

"Nay, I bear no grudge. I war a bit of a fooil just now, I'm thinking; an' ye've getten a fist as hard as a cobble-stone; an' mebbe we'll like each other noan th' war, maister, for what's owered wi'."

It was the upland spirit, and Royd wondered, now that he felt himself so much at home with all these old-time neighbours, that he could ever have doubted their friendship toward himself. Still, he had sunk his pride just now; he had stooped to argue and to plead, when both were foreign to his nature; and now the masterfulness leaped out again upon the sudden.

"I've said what I came to say, men," he went on. "You strike, and I close my mill for good, and there'll be one less chance of labour in the parish afterwards; you don't strike, and we shall weather through the storm together somehow. It rests with you to settle—but you've got to settle now and here. I'll have no more talk, and shilly-shally, and unrest."

"We want no more shilly-shally; we're sick to death on't," said Eli Shackleton.

"Well, then, put up your hands like men, those of you who mean to strike, and I'll thank you for your honesty."

No hand was raised, but they came forward one by one, and laid their knotty fists in Royd's, and said they'd

work for him come dark times or come fair. He knew there would be no going back on that sort of promise; he had done his work here, and with characteristic distaste to loitering, he bade them all a curt farewell, and went out to carry on the business which had been so long delayed.

"Broach a barrel, landlord. These folk want all to drink to their good sense," he said, as he went out along the passage.

"Bribery," growled the sallow-faced agitator.

"Tha'rt wide o' th' mark theer, lad," answered Eli Shackleton. "Ye cannot bribe at after a thing's settled; an' if Maister Royd had knawn no better nor to offer us ale at th' first—we'd hev struck, I reckon, ivery man-jack on us."

Royd was in the saddle by this time, and was riding at the trot toward Goit Mill; and for the first time he realised how heavily this question of the strike had weighed on him—knew by the lightness of his spirits, and the lifting of that dull anxiety which had robbed the spring months of their savour. Again he looked with new eyes at the Heights gables and the Heights trees which showed upon the hill-slope opposite; he would have money now with which to feed the lands he loved, money to clothe them royally in green of meadow-grass and gold of the well-won corn; the mortgage was his, and greater wealth than ever his father had enjoyed would soon be his; meanwhile he could wait until such time as Bancroft's follies ripened —could wait, and be content.

So little like himself he was, that when he saw Billy

Puff come waddling up the hill, his face a fine full red and his cheeks expanding and contracting in the effort to get cool, Royd stopped his horse to throw a word of banter at the constable.

"Well met upon the road, constable," he said. "There's need of you at the Friendly Inn, if all I hear be true."

Billy's face brightened, for a tavern offered potent opportunities to an imagination that in other respects was none too keen. "Oh, ay," he answered. "Well, I knaw my duty, Maister Royd, an' I knaw th' law, I hope, as weel as most. What's agate up yonder, then?"

"Some brawl or other, so they tell me."

"This needs considering, like," said Billy Puff, with sudden doubt. "Happen they're fighting still, Maister Royd? An' if so be as they are, wod I be wiser to hod off a bit an' let 'em cool?"

"Nay, constable! I looked to you to run between them and stop the quarrel."

"Well, a lighter-headed man wod do as mich," said Billy pompously. "A lighter-headed constable wod put his head in amang th' blows, an' get hitten, an' so mak a byword o' th' King he represents. Nay, nay, maister! I knaw th' responsibilities I carry, but I'm thankful that I've noan let 'em warp my judgment, like. I'll let 'em fratch, an' I'll let 'em bleed th' ill humours out—an' then I'll come i' time for th' pains an' penalties as by law directed. That's what I war set i' my high station for—to punish at after a bit o' wrong-doing's done."

"You talk like the Bench, constable," said Royd, with an easy laugh. "It's only the dull folk who think you should step in before the mischief's done."

The constable accepted Royd's banter with his usual seriousness. "There'd be few cobblers if shooin niver wore out, an' fewer constables if they kept folk fro' breaking th' law," he said, in a tone that precluded all dispute. "If ye set a trap for a ratten now, wod ye go warn him off just when he's getten his nose at th' door on't?"

"I've a lot to learn yet, William; for I own that this view of the matter had never struck me."

Billy Puff looked up at the master-weaver with kindly condescension. "Well, my head is a fearful long way round, maister, an' theer's nobbut here an' there one that's fit like to be a constable, an' if ye've learned owt fro' me touching th' dark an' fearsome ways o' law—why, ye're welcome to't. Gooid-morning to ye, an' I'll step it slowly to th' Friendly, until it's time for th' pains an' penalties."

Royd went his way, and his gaiety slipped off him soon as he came in sight of Goit Mill—bleak, sordid, with the nameless air of misery and oppression all about it. Reaction from his late unrest and sudden victory came on apace; and he asked himself, as he rode through the mill-gate, if he were glad or sorry that the failure of the strike had pledged him to another year of drudgery.

If there had been unrest at the Friendly Inn on this last day of May, if Royd had felt disquiet, there was unrest at quiet old Wynyates too, though now, just

after the early hour of dinner, it showed no trace of it. The trees that stood on the moorside of the house were heavy with their leaves; the shadows under them were cool with the coolness of deep water; the grey old house itself was taking its after-dinner sleep—tranquilly, as if it had long since lived through the time when sunshine and the summer bade it snatch restlessly at all which summer and the sunshine had to give it. Yet even in sleep the chivalry and courteous smoothness of old lineage seemed somehow stamped upon its walls, as surely as they showed in Squire Cunliffe or in his daughter Barbara. It had lived, this Grey House on the Hill; it had known the thrill of manhood meeting womanhood, and loving—the swifter course of wedlock—the deep and steadfast mother-love and father-pride that listened to the laughter of little children up and down the panelled passages; it had watched jealousy and kinship war together—had rocked to the storm of hate, and shuddered at the haplessness of sorrows not to be assuaged. It was living itself by this time; tears had greyed its face, and knowledge of life's recompenses had softened it; the glamour of experience, sieved through a kindly heart, was instinct in its every line.

And Barbara was a part of it, as she came through the open door and crossed the flagged space that lay between the right-hand strip of garden and the left. She was friends with the grey old home, had watched and loved it; and it had given her something—something no more to be explained than the gold of celandines in March—which was hers alone. She did

not disturb the silence, the shadowed, half-forgetful peace of house and courtyard and square-topped horsing-steps; she only brought with her an added warmth, as of a frail wind blowing from the south.

Nothing was to be hurried over, nothing missed. She leaned her arms upon the low rounded garden-wall, and counted her riches all afresh, and knew that selfless passion for the gifts of breaking bloom and spreading leaf which in itself is frank acknowledgment of God. There was no other garden spoke to her like this—none had such freedom in a little space, or let the fine and humble suited flowers live cheek by jowl with such unstudied friendliness. Low-lying, homely musk grew at the foot of giant peonies; lavender and rue, sweet marjoram, rosemary and bushy lad's-love found each their corner; London pride, with its dainty blooms of pink and white, encroached upon the bed of nodding columbines, and gold day-lilies drooped their heads close by the red-tipped foxglove buds. But nearer than them all to the glamour of the house—more kin than all, perhaps, to Barbara's self—were the pansies, which found a home in every trifling space. Over yonder by the wall a clump of the wildest sort lifted their little faces to the warmth, a plant of half-wild ones, purple and yellow, lived near neighbour to them; and all along the front the cultivated sort held right of place—great clumps of them, white, pied, and purple, turning wide eyes and velvet cheeks to the freshness of the breeze and the deep rich splendour of the sunshine.

A linnet sang from the rhododendron bush beside

the wall, and Barbara turned to give him a soft, answering whistle. Above the chimney-stacks a peewit wheeled, and cried with less forlornness in his note than on the February day when Royd had hailed him, on the road to Wyecollar, as a brother Ishmael. Perhaps, for all that, the peewit brought a touch of sadness into the day; for Barbara no longer whistled to the linnet, but looked up with troubled eyes toward where the lapwing glanced white and black across the sloping roof. Then her glance went quickly to the parlour windows, that watched her soberly from under their six narrow mullions; she could see the spinet dimly outlined against the gloom within, and once again the memory came to her of how she had given much to Stephen Royd in this same parlour—had given something which had deepened the summer's gladness and its pathos for her—something which had taken the veil of childhood for ever from her eyes, and had shown her a new world where men and women stood on either brink of great happiness, and looked across at one another, and feared to risk the steep descent from the hilltops of endeavour and of pride.

She chased the mood away, however, and a roguish light displaced the trouble in her face. She was thinking now how she and Stephen had gone a-grouse-snaring together in days gone by, how they had walked and galloped as they listed from edge to edge of the great moor-reaches that they loved; could she be afraid now of the comrade who had been so leal to her? Could she withdraw from him as persistently as she had done of late? He had been her bondslave

once; and surely, Barbara whispered to herself, it was no less than a duty to remember old and faithful servants. Smiling softly at the thought, she stooped above the wall and plucked a sprig of rosemary that caught her restless glance.

"Rosemary for remembrance," she murmured. "Shall I go to Hazel Mill to-day?"

For it was her birthday, and far back as she could remember anything it had been a rite and ceremony of the day that she should visit Stephen at the mill, and carry the Squire's entreaty that he would come that night to sup at Wynyates in little Barbara's honour. Would Stephen forget, she wondered, now that another twelvemonth's crust had settled on the days of remembrance and of rosemary?

"Nay, but he'll expect me," she cried; "and, whether it is maidenly or no, I cannot let him think me quite forgetful."

A step sounded on the flagged passage that led from the main door, and by and by Squire Cunliffe turned the corner of the garden wall. The warmth of the day, and a little of its peace, was on him; but his step was faltering, and he looked at the tokens of summer with the eye of one who does not look to enjoy either summer or bleak weather over-long. When he saw Barbara, however, sitting on a grey coping-stone and rubbing the rosemary between her hands, and hiding her face among the savour of it, according to a habit that he knew by heart—the old Squire's youth seemed for the moment to return. He went down to her, and stood and watched her in playful silence; and there

was something piteous in the picture of these two, side by side in the courtyard that had seen the long generations pass—she, who had so many summers to look forward to that their number seemed too great for reckoning; and he, who did not know if he would see another spring grow green above the old grey gables —he, who was eager now for longer life, not for his own sake, but for Barbara's.

"What are your thoughts, Babette?" he said at last.

She kept her eyes steadily on the rosemary, not understanding the impulse that bade her hide her thoughts, and ashamed of it. Then she looked up into his face with the candour that had grown like a sweet-smelling herb between the father and the daughter.

"I was thinking of Stephen, father, and saying to myself that he would miss my birthday visit to the mill."

"True, true," the Squire murmured, with sudden disquiet. "I have feared lately, Barbara, that he may think we slight him; I cannot tell—I hate these trade-days so—but I would never hurt a son of Jasper Royd's if I could help it."

Barbara's last doubt vanished; a father's counsel may be very comforting if it points the way the south wind blows. "Then you will grant me leave to go and see him? Oh, I am so glad, father; he *must* not fancy us—must not fancy us—anything but what we are," she finished vaguely.

The Squire did not answer. He was thinking, not for the first time, how heartily he could have welcomed Royd, if only his fortunes had not been ruined at the

start; how heartily he could have wished him well with Barbara, had circumstance dealt kindlier with the lad; but now, for Barbara's sake, he dared not tell her why she was not free to follow where her heart directed.

"Shall I ask Stephen to come sup with us to-night?" she said softly. "I think it is my birthday privilege to ask him."

"No, no, child!" he cried, returning from the might-have-been. "I have asked Mr. Bancroft for to-night, and he and Stephen are not the best of friends."

"No," said Barbara, with a smile that was gone as soon as it had come; "it is not likely that they would be, is it, father?"

The Squire shifted from foot to foot, and traced a wavering pattern with his cane upon the lichens of the wall. "Is not this Bancroft well enough?" he said at last. "What ails you, child, to see only the little things in which he is lacking?"

Her glance had genuine surprise in it. "I scarcely see even them, I fear," she answered frankly. "Mr. Bancroft—how shall I say it?—seems to be just a shadow to me. I'm foolish, maybe; but his talk goes by me like wind among the rushes."

The Squire could not have had his own feeling toward Bancroft voiced more clearly; but he would not admit as much. "Babette," he said, with the half-hearted sternness that stood for keen rebuke, "I do not like to hear my little maid speak so of any man. If your judgment is so harsh at eighteen, what will it be by the time you come to middle life?"

She laughed, with the reckless assurance of the

young; and then she crept close up to him, and smoothed with one slim forefinger the lines of trouble that each passing month was graving deeper.

"Middle life is such a world away, daddy," she said; "I can't think I shall ever reach so far. So why perplex yourself about me?"

"It seems so far off, does it? Then what of old age, child?"

His tone was so quiet, and yet so full of subtle sadness, that the girl's eyes filled with tears. She saw old age as she had never seen it until now; its pathos seemed to deepen and grow understandable; she realised in some degree what it must mean to have memories instead of boundless hopes, and only a little graveward strip of road to travel in place of the sunlit way that once had stretched on to the far horizon and beyond. *Old age*—it was a thing to be treated reverently, to be treated with surpassing gentleness; and a new tenderness—a deep, protecting tenderness—swept over Barbara. This father who had cared for her so loyally—she must repay him for it now. It was he now who was the child—even weaker than a child in some ways, inasmuch as the sap was not gaining in his veins, but dwindling to a weakened thread.

"Daddy, I *will* be good to you!" she cried, letting her tenderness find voice. "I'll make it up to you—the old age, and the weariness, and all—I'll make you see the sunshine with my eyes, and hope my hopes, and love the whole brave round again in me."

"Why, little maid, you've done as much for me already," he answered, drawing her to him. "There,

there! It's no day for tears, Babette; and see, I'm not so old by half as you would make me out to be."

His voice faltered at the last, and both were silent for awhile, and the bond between them was drawn tighter as the moment of selfless outgoing, each to the other, lengthened.

The Squire freed her presently, and took to walking up and down the courtyard; and the old, harassed look came back to him by slow degrees.

"I think you could make a sacrifice for me, if one were needful, Babette," he said.

"Any sacrifice," she cried impulsively, "any sacrifice, if only it would smooth the trouble from your face. Father, what is it? That look of unrest which has been growing with each passing month. You would never tell me what it meant."

"It—was nothing, Barbara. You must not let such fancies stay with you."

"It is no fancy," she said, looking up into his face; "and this afternoon you're going to tell me what it is, father; and I am going to show you how a load is lightened when there are two to share it."

He hesitated, began to speak, then checked himself. "I am glad you are going to Hazel Mill," he said abruptly, "lest Stephen should think we are altogether cold to him. There! You had better start at once, child, and then I shall have you back the sooner."

"But the sacrifice you spoke of—some sacrifice I could make for you," she went on, unwilling to be turned aside just when she had all but crossed the threshold of his confidence.

"I may ask one from you by and by," the Squire murmured; "I cannot tell—there are perplexities I cannot see my way through—but you shall not share them till you must. Go, Barbara, and let all troubles drift; your cheeks are whiter than I like to see them."

Seeing him fixed in his resolve, she tried to show a brighter face to him as she bade farewell; and at the corner of the road she turned for a last glance. Again she felt that rush of pity and of tenderness, seeing him stand there, bent, wistful, and forlorn, with the tranquil house behind him and the sleepy, breeze-stirred trees above his head.

"You'll not be long away, Babette?" he called, with an old man's instinctive plea against the solitude he dreads.

"I cannot be," she answered, with something of her old laugh; "Tim o' Tab's was watching my bees this morning, and he says they're sure to swarm to-day. He vowed, indeed, they had waited for my birthday."

"Doubtless they have, Babette. You must not disappoint them."

The Squire stood where Barbara had left him, long after he had seen her disappear, swinging her hat in one brown and ungloved hand. He thought of Bancroft of the Heights; he remembered the fifty little points in which he lacked gentility, and the roystering habits with which the moorside credited him. Bancroft was coming to-night to receive his final answer; he could put off the hour of his perplexity no longer, in the vague hope that the morrow, and the morrow, and the morrow, would bring some turn of fate that

should render his decision easy and straightforward. He must make decision now—now, with the summer stillness all about him, and the grey house whispering to him of the family honour, which had ever been the first and last article of this world's faith with all the Cunliffes. Barbara must marry, and marry soon; she need not know the reason yet—the reason whose nature and whose cogency was known to none save to himself and Tim o' Tab's.

Still as the slumbrous elms themselves was old Squire Cunliffe; still as the garden-walls, the horsing-steps, the silent strip of road; and a bitterness was on him beyond any he had known. Barbara had promised that she would make him live again in her; but there was no need for such promise; for no father surely had ever lost himself so completely in his daughter as had the Squire. His own happiness was less than nothing, —he had peered too curiously over the edge of his own grave for that,—and decision for this very cause was doubly hard. His head was hot, and his heart was beating fast, as he told himself that on the issue of to-night the child's happiness must stand or fall.

And yet his thoughts were all in the wrong groove, for lack of one small piece of knowledge. All would have been different if he had known that Stephen Royd was master of more than one small mill and one tiny, two-roomed cottage. He would have forgiven the trade, for under all his hatred of it his love for the only son of Jasper Royd was staunch and tried. But he did not know, for it pleased Royd to show threadbare fortunes to the world and to hide his wealth

as if it were a crime; and the Squire came to his decision, there with the tangled scents of rue and pansy-blooms and lilies all about him; and Royd, for lack of one word which none came to whisper in the old Squire's ear, gave up his place to Bancroft of the Heights.

Scheme as he would, there seemed no other way for it. And so the Squire, when his mind was once made up, began to gild young Bancroft's weaknesses. Had not he, too, been wild when his youth was hot? Had not he come to love a woman fair as Barbara? and might not the daughter, like the mother, prove strong to lead a laggard into the fold of chastity and all right-living?

"Young Bancroft loves her," he muttered. "Ay, there's no doubt of that; and all may yet be very well with them."

He thought then of Barbara. How would she take it? She neither liked nor disliked Bancroft; it would have been better if she had. He realised, clearly enough, that he could never hope to see her marry him of her own free will; she would shrink still more from wedlock if he were frank with her as to the reason; he must depend entirely on her sense of sacrifice and of blind duty. And he had faith in these.

Yet it was a sad tangle to the Squire; and as he turned to go into the house, there to await the coming of Bancroft of the Heights, his head was bent in deep humiliation.

"To have brought her to this!" he groaned. "She's

all I have—and I must give her into Bancroft's keeping."

Royd himself, meanwhile—Royd, who could so easily have laid certain doubts to rest—had chanced upon Parson Horrocks at the bend of Dangerous Corner.

"Parson," he said, with a broader smile than his face had worn this many a day, "Parson, I shall be free of it all within the twelvemonth. I've not been open with you of late, perhaps; I wanted to draw the reins tight into my hands before I said a word to you."

"What, are times so good as that with you? Few other men have found them so of late."

"They are so good that I have all but bought the Heights mortgages. You told me, sir, I should have the chance one day, and it came to me the very night I last spent with you here."

The Parson crossed to this man whom he had fathered, and gripped him by the hand. "Stephen lad, I wish you well! I've watched you at the mill, and I've watched you with your eyes upon the Heights. How long now have you been dreaming of this day? Since you were sixteen—'tis a long while to walk uphill, eh, Stephen?"

There was a break in the older man's voice; he had long since learned to find his keenest joys in watching the success of others, and now, with perfect understanding of all this meant to Stephen, he was glad as

if he had gained for himself the long low house upon the hill.

"But the top is well worth gaining, sir, and I'm going to rest a little when I reach it," answered Royd.

"To rest? Nay, lad, not after the years of toil. You'll take to farming, likely, as you took to wool, and make your farm-folk wish that you had clung to trade."

"Maybe—and none knows how sweet the feel of farming-tools will be after this other feel of wool," said Stephen, with a sort of gaiety in his deep, grave voice. "Parson, it is good to be master of one's destiny."

A sense of foreboding seized the Parson, a vague, elusive feeling that somewhere there was a wrong note; and before he knew the words had framed themselves. "Stephen," he was saying, "let him that thinketh he standeth— You know the rest, lad. You're master of the mortgages—master of your fortunes just now; but there's a Hand upon you—whether you will or no."

"There's a hand on me—the hand of One who likes to see a man helping himself. It is what I have said to Barbara always of the Cunliffe lucklessness—that luck is work, and only work."

"And yet—tell me one thing, lad," said the Parson, wistfully almost; "is it for someone else that you are working? Is there the thought of another's happiness somewhere deep under all the efforts?"

Royd laughed, a round, contented laugh. "There is, sir—but her happiness is mine, I fear."

The old man doffed his graver air, and laid his hand on Stephen's shoulder, and, "I'm not to preach, on this of all good nights, am I?" he said. "The work has been fairly done, and I have helped you to it in my little way, and to-morrow, if you'll sup with me, we will crack a bottle together as of old, Stephen, you and I."

Yet again that feeling of disquiet seized the Parson as he reached the churchyard and wandered down among his graves, and thought of all that Royd had told him—thought of his eagerness, his self-confidence, his certainty that the Heights would soon be his. Disquiet grew into fear in no long time; for this was the place of buried ambitions, and aught save self-confessed humility seemed sadly out of place.

"A Royd, he's a Royd," he murmured; "stubborn and stiff, with a pride that I have liked to see in him—with a pride I fear to think of now. Well, God grant he may not chance on some ill-fortune yet; for the lad has worked—ay, he has worked for it!"

CHAPTER XII

A BIRTHDAY MEETING

BARBARA, as she turned the corner of the road, carrying the picture of the Squire's forlornness with her, seemed to have lost her youth. Her step was languid, and there was trouble in her face; for until now she had only realised dimly, without admitting it, how heavily the years were bearing on her father. Her eyes seemed to have been opened suddenly this afternoon; she had seen a score little signs of feebleness, of growing care; and under all her warm sympathy for the Squire, there came the thought that her old life at Wynyates, so free and full of intimate delights, must soon be broken up.

The mood left her by and by, however, as little by little the lusty, hard-won warmth of field and moor laid its own spell on her. May was dying, and the feet of June were climbing, swift and golden, up the stair of summer; the moor was no longer grey and black, and its tragic face was hidden under such glowing warmth of brown and crimson, bright green and silver-white, that it seemed rather a wide garden, walled by the kindly sky, than a barren waste whereon the winter winds and winter snow had wreaked their will. Nor did the wind know itself, so tempered was it and

so sweet; for the sun-warmed beds of heath, mile after rolling mile, had lain in wait for it, and held it a little moment as it passed, and sent it forward the richer for its tarrying.

"I don't know you, moor!" cried Barbara, standing to watch the swelling rise of Marshcotes Moor across the valley. "You change like this each spring—and every spring you hold the same surprise for me."

She was a child again, untroubled, wondering, glad of the five quick senses that gave her understanding of all this; then she passed toward the lower lying lands, and there was yellow everywhere—yellow of buttercups that turned the meadows into lakes of gold, whose surface was wind-ruffled into burnished waves —yellow of charlock flowers, with the frail, elusive scent that strong sunshine can compel from them—yellow of the sun, as the light hill-vapours, gathering between green heath and deep blue sky, mellowed his garishness. Farmer folk were working in the fields, or they were walking with laggard steps among their crops. And the same thought was in their minds as in Barbara's, had habit let them acknowledge it—that the long winter had been well worth the winning through for one such God-sent day as this.

Barbara remembered many a spring, but never one that could compare with this. Only generous rain in the forepart of the year, followed by week after week of ripe sun-heat, could have brought leaf and flower and blade to such perfection. The undergrowth by wall-sides and in coppices was rank and vivid green; the meadow-grass had that depth of bottom to it which

a farmer loves to see; the thorns and rowans had twice their usual crop of berries.

"It fair teems, mistress—fair teems wi' wickness," said Farmer Haggas, as he met Barbara coming through his pastures.

"Have you ever known such a spring? *Ever,* Mr. Haggas?" she answered, stopping for a gossip, as everyone must do on such a morning.

"Ay, one—just one, an' that war a far while back—afore ye war born or thowt on, mistress."

She looked at him demurely. "And have you not one complaint to make against the weather?" she asked.

"Ay, ay, I've getten my own opinion on't; an' so wad ye if ye'd lived neighbour to Marshcotes weather as long as me. It'll hev th' laugh on us yet, mistress, one way or t'other. There's yon field o' mowing-grass, now; it's rising grandly, an' there's herbs enough in't to sweeten mony a side o' beef. But what then? It'll come rain—hail an' thunner, likely, into th' bargain—sooin as iver we get th' scythes well into't; an' then it mud as weel be straw for all th' gooid there'll be in't."

"And if it doesn't rain?" laughed Barbara, preparing to go on again. "Will you admit the weather's good behaviour then?"

Farmer Haggas shook his head with slow assurance as he stooped to mow a thistle with his stick. "I wodn't like to," he said. "It's weel enough to let a day like this go through an' through ye, an' mak a fooil on ye. That's weel enough if ye're on th' young

side of experience, an' if ye've niver had a farm to follow. But I mind what my father allus said; he'd knawn t' weather for threescore years, hed my father, an' he allus said to me, 'John,' says he, 'trust a woman, an' she'll happen not fooil ye more nor once i' ivery twice; but trust to t' weather, an' ye'll niver be owt else but fooiled.'"

"Oh, you're an unbeliever!" laughed Barbara. "I knew you would find some cause for grumbling somewhere."

"An' I'm not th' only one as hes his doubts," went on the other, with great content. "I met Maister Royd not long since, riding back fro' Scartop way; an' I said it war noan as bad a day as some I'd seed; an' he said it war reet for us farmers, but he feared his dams war going to run dry."

Barbara's colour deepened at the chance reference to Stephen; and she stayed to hear no more of Farmer Haggas's philosophy, though he tried all his slow arts to detain her; for the one thing about the moorside of which he had no doubts was little Mistress Barbara.

"Stephen thinks always of his mills in these sad days," she murmured, frowning as she went down the last long field that opened into Hazel Dene.

The long drought, indeed, was threatening the water-supply of every mill about the moorside; the crops had bottom moisture left over from the early rains, and there had been slight gloaming-showers to keep them fresh of leaf; but hardly a stream ran more than half its usual height, and it was with real anxiety that Royd, after his frugal midday meal, went up the dene

to see how low the level of his dams had sunk. Hazel Beck, however, was always the last stream to run dry, and he found the water standing at its wonted level in all three ponds—just touching the overhanging boughs of thorn, that is, and dipping them now and then in a bath that left them sparkling with a thousand rainbow-drops.

"The rain will come," thought Royd, "before we, at anyrate, run short of water."

Instinctively he looked up toward the moor, which was the mother of all his mill-wheel's vigour, all its noisiness and haste; and on the sudden his face changed, as he shaded his eyes with one hand against the sun that stood southward up above the middle of the valley. It was long since Barbara had been his visitor, and even yet he doubted his own eyesight. Down the wooded dene she came, dainty and fresh as the summer's day itself, with a step that had learned in babyhood to move across the rough moor-ways without a stumble.

"Barbara!" cried Royd, in a voice that betrayed the trend of many a recent musing.

"Why, yes. Is it so very wonderful that Barbara should come to Hazel Mill to-day? You look as if I were a ghost, Stephen."

She had not expected to be so free of shame; indeed, she had more than once, during the walk from Wynyates, half-turned about and asked herself if pride would ever let her get to Hazel Mill. But now—now that she stood face to face with him, and saw the little signs of feeling that women notice—her own embar-

DOWN THE WOODED DENE SHE CAME, DAINTY AND FRESH AS THE SUMMER'S DAY.

rassment was altogether lost in his; she was conscious only of a desire to put him at his ease. Her sense of humour, too, was touched that it should be so,—that she, the child who had played about his knee, should have to teach him self-possession now.

"It is long since we met in Hazel Dene," he stammered.

"Fie, Stephen! You've forgotten—as I feared you would. Do you know what day it is?"

His face cleared suddenly. "Why, it is your birthday, Babs!" he cried.

"Yes, but you did not know it until you were reminded."

"I am growing old, Babette."

"Is trade so all-absorbing that such little things slip by?" said she, after a silence.

He thought of the way in which the child had crossed and re-crossed all his schemes, of pride, ambition, money-making—crossed them as the weft goes in and out among the warp, making the finished piece; and he laughed, for a reason Barbara could not know.

"You have not answered me," she said.

"I was thinking—thinking that Barbara's birthday was perhaps the biggest thing that ever Ling Crag Moorside knew."

"Thank you, Stephen," she said, lifting her brows a little. "Mr. Bancroft of the Heights makes me that sort of speech once every day at least—I think I do not care for them, somehow."

The rebuke went by him; he was too sure of his own heart. "Little Barbara, I'm not young enough to

flatter you," he said. "I had forgotten your birthday, it puzzled me to know just why I did."

"Indeed, I don't know, Stephen. Trade has changed you, that is all."

"Yes," he said, his old sense of loss of caste returning to him, "trade has come between us, Barbara, and you know it."

She looked him frankly in the face, with the clear, unswerving honesty that was half the secret of her charm. "That is not true, Stephen," she said. "Do I care how you make your living? You make it, and you're Stephen, and that suffices."

Royd wondered and was silent. None but Barbara could have said so much, yet left the man she praised so sure of his own humbleness.

"Babs," he said, after another silence, "I have done a day's work to-day—a real day's work. My men were going to strike, and I made them see my side of the question."

"Oh, I am glad!" she cried. "There have been so many rumours lately, and they told me you would be ruined, Stephen, along with all the other masters."

"No, I shall not be ruined, Babs."

"Hush! Say 'God willing'—say 'God willing'; if only to please me, Stephen. I'm frightened when you say, 'I will, I will,' and never stop to think of—of what may come to spoil your plans."

"If God wills, I shall better my fortunes," he said, with a submissiveness she had not looked for. "And then, Babette? What then?"

There was such mastery in his face—such a plain,

"And you shall share my fortunes,"—that she was frightened of herself—of him—of circumstance.

"You—you'll wonder why I came to-day," she murmured—eager to say anything that should in some way lessen that air of mastery. "I—I couldn't forget old days as lightly as certain of my friends; and so I came, as I have always done, to play about the mill, and to see your eerie water-wheel turn round, and to watch the ducks go waddling after the fussy drake who leads them to the stream."

He was silent, looking at her. Men had found him hard in trade, had learned that his stubborn will met theirs like flint, and would not be gainsaid; but it was Babette who bore the full brunt of it now. He knew, with the clearness that a man may go through life and never know, that he must win her; she was the other half of him; she made the scheme of things intelligible, straight. She, too, had her will, and it was strong; yet she was clay in his hands at this meeting-place of their two destinies.

The chance slipped by him. It was his weakness and his strength that he would do nothing anyway by halves, and he said to himself that he would win free of trade, free of the things that she neither understood nor liked, before he told her what must very soon be told. The mill was too near; the smell of wool was in the air; and Barbara was apart from all these things.

"I don't believe you have changed," he said. The words were in themselves a blunt command.

"I changed?" she echoed in surprise. "Why, no. Who told you so?"

"No one," he answered briefly. "Come see the brave old sights, Babs."

Troubled, unsure of the ground upon which they stood, she followed him past the triple row of dams, and loitered by the goit where ferns and ragged robin and a last pale primrose eye looked down upon the racing water.

"The dams have not altered, Stephen—nor the goit—nor the wee wildflowers," she said. But her voice was sorrowful, as if all else had altered.

"They never guessed that there was money in the world," he answered briefly.

They said no more until they came to the dark roof that hid the water-wheel. Barbara held one wooden pillar with both hands and peeped round into the swirling stream of water that came black, save where the wheel had churned it into white, from out its noisy prison-house. All the old mystery returned to her, all the old vague, elusive charm—the sense of horror as the water went lap, lap, lapping up, against its walls—the dank, soft odour—the feeling that this tireless wheel had life, malignant life, in it. For awhile she stood there, peering into the noisy gloom; and then she turned her back on it, and laughed, and—

"Stephen," she said, "I *know* there's a goblin ready to spring out on me."

"He's over-busy—he has to keep the wheel in motion."

"Ah, yes, I remember the tale you used to frighten me with at gloaming-tide. Directly work ceases in the mill, and the wheel need not be kept in motion any

longer, the goblin leaves his prison. I remember, Stephen! He has a mouth of fire that the water cannot quench, and great, webbed feet that help him in the turning of the wheel; and his chief meals—his serious meals—have little maids for a foundation. Was not that the old fairy-tale you used to frighten me with? I think you must often have wanted to be rid of me in the old days, Stephen."

"I often feared the long walk home to Wynyates for you. I was always afraid for you, Babette, somehow—you were so fairy-like and slight."

A sudden helplessness came over her. His kindness hurt her—it should have been sheer cruelty, or something more than kindness.

"It's the same little girl, Stephen," she said wearily, —"and she has still a long walk home to Wynyates. Good-bye."

He tried to keep her, but she would not stay; tried to bring back to mind that old custom bade her take bite and sup within his cottage, but she would not listen. And so at last he walked with her as far as the foot-road leading upward to Ling Crag. And all the way the child was struggling with her pride on the one hand, and on the other with her sense of what was due to Stephen. Kindliness claimed the victory, as usual, while Royd was holding out his hand in token of farewell.

"I—I have something to say to you, Stephen," she said, with her old fearless glance, though the words came haltingly. "I wanted to ask you to sup with us to-night—that is old custom, too, you know—but Mr.

Bancroft is coming up to Wynyates—on some business, so I judge."

Royd recalled how he had heard this invitation given to Bancroft of the Heights, as they all stood after church-time in the Marshcotes street; he recalled his own misgiving at the time, his wonder as to the reason why Bancroft's presence should be sought for at the Wynyates supper-board on the red-letter day of old Squire Cunliffe's life. And now he laughed at his own misgivings; Barbara spoke of the matter with such carelessness—nay, with such disdain—that it was clear there could be no deeper motive in it. If Bancroft were coming as a suitor, then Barbara would surely have had some hint of it by this.

"I shall miss you to-night," he said—"I shall miss you more than you know of, Babette."

One glance she gave him, and then she went up the shadowed field as if she feared pursuit. Twice Royd made forward, under the impulse to say what had been left unsaid down there in Hazel Dene; and twice he checked himself. It was not long to wait, God willing, before he could come to her with clean hands—come to her as the Master of the Heights, and plead his suit.

If he had known! But he knew as little as did Barbara—Barbara, who was asking herself, with grave self-condemnation, if she had not been over-generous just now to Stephen in telling him so frankly what her wishes were, and what her regrets.

The combers, meanwhile, were finishing their Mon-

day's Parliament at the Friendly Inn in the fashion that best pleased them. They had been ripe for mischief earlier in the day; they had been passion-driven by the memory of their sufferings; they had listened to Royd's talk and had come to a decision which was to affect their future very gravely, one way or the other; and now they had shaken themselves free of gravity, as a dog shakes the water off its back, and they were boys again. Perhaps it was the energy with which they laboured at the comb and pot in working-hours; perhaps it was the freedom of their work, and their freedom from the anxieties which perplexed the farmers; whatever the cause, they were the lightest-hearted section of a community which was not given over-much to gaiety.

It was Tim o' Tab's who led them into frolic to-day —Tim, who was anxious at all costs to keep them in good humour, so that Royd's victory of the morning might be sealed. When he looked through the bar-window, then, and saw Billy Puff come strutting up the street—after his meeting with Stephen Royd and his promise to come up in time to enforce the "pains and penalties"—Tim blessed the constable who only yesterday had put him in the stocks. Billy was fat, and big, and of a vanity that dulled his wits; there was no man in the parish so popular as a butt; and he, for his part, was partial to these Monday gatherings at the Friendly; for he liked his ale, and he liked to drink at other men's expense, and he was so apt a target for jests of all kinds that the combers were

always ready to stand him treat. A shout went up this morning, as Tim looked over his shoulder at the combers.

"Here's Billy Puff, lads!" he cried. "I thowt he'd noan be so varry long away fro' th' Friendly on a Monday."

"Ay, I'll warrant theer's Billy Puff," laughed Shackleton. "He can smell beer as a dog winds a fox, can Billy."

"We'll hev a bit o' fun wi' him, lads," Tim murmured. "It wodn't be like a Monday, wod it now? if we didn't mak him puff an' blow a bit."

"He made thee puff an' blow a bit yestermorn, Tim," put in another comber slily; "I saw thee i' th' stocks as I came home fro' chapel, an' I couldn't deny 'at Billy hed th' laugh on ye that time."

"Doubles is quits," Tim answered gaily; "an I'm noan denying I've my own reasons for wanting to see Billy Puff look fooilish."

The constable had entered the inn by this time, and was moving down the passage. True to his ideal of a constable's duty, he had come very slowly up the hill, with frequent rests whenever he reached to a gate or a low piece of wall; but now he judged that the quarrel, if any such there had been, would be in a fair way to be settled. He waddled in, accordingly, as far as the threshold of the bar, then thrust his face just round the corner of the door, with a certain air of slyness which he judged to be a necessary adjunct of the law.

"Is theer ony law-breaking abroad?" said he. "I

doan't trust ye ower far, an' I'm answerable to His Majesty for th' peace o' this here parish."

"Ye are that, William—an' thy duty taks thee often, I've noticed, within ale-tap reach."

"My duty taks me wheer my duty lies, an' that's more nor some on ye can say. I met Maister Royd just now on th' road, an, he telled me there war some mak o' fighting going forrard here; an' so I came reet on up th' hill, wi' a mind set on higher matters nor beer—not but what it's cooling to th' wits, is ale, if ye tak it reetly," he added tentatively. "I've knawn a man wark better for't, an' th' law is a heating sort o' trade to follow."

"Give him a quart mug, lads," cried Tim o' Tab's. "We shall see less o' yond barrel-full o' Maister Royd's by th' half now Billy's come to see th' peace kept."

"So Maister Royd telled ye there'd been a bit o' a fratching-do?" put in Shackleton. "Well, he should knaw, I reckon, for it war him 'at fratched—an' me 'at war felled as flat as a penny-piece."

"He didn't claim no share in it hisseln," said the constable doubtfully. "Nay, I doubt you're trailing me; he looks too quiet, does Maister Royd, for ony sich wark as yond."

"Us trail *thee*, William?" said Tim o' Tab's, with his gentlest air. "We're ower-fond o' thee begow! Tha mud be putting us all into th' stocks again."

The constable glowed with memory of his recent triumph. "I'm noan denying I did my duty by ye, Tim o' Tab's; an' I'm pleased to see ye tak it i' th' reet spirit, wi' humbleness an' sorrow."

Tim looked doubly contrite. "It's made a new man o' me—made me all ower again, as th' saying is—an' I bear thee no sort o' malice for't, William, as some chaps wod."

Billy's face was buried in his mug by this time, or he would have seen a meaning look and a meaning wink pass from one to another of the combers; for they knew this mood of Tim's, and they prepared to look on at the sport as they would have watched a cock-fight or a game of knur-and-spell.

As for Tim, he had tried unavailingly, during a quiet Sabbath evening's poaching, to find some way in which to straighten the score between himself and Billy Puff; and now he was feeling his way until the constable, as the ale mellowed and increased his foolishness, should give him some clear opening. Tim, indeed, might have been tickling trout, so carefully he moved toward his quarry; a touch of flattery here, and a touch there; a growing conviction of the constable's dignity; a wish to let old sores be healed. And all the while Billy was mellowing fast; and all the while the combers backed up Tim o' Tab's with a gravity equal to his own.

Flick, the terrier, however, bade fair to open up one ancient ground of quarrel. The dog's humour had all the flavour of his master's, and it pleased him now to exhibit a deep curiosity touching Billy's calves—with no bad intentions in the world, but simply for the sport of seeing him withdraw, ale-pot in hand, to the partial security offered by the wall.

"Lig thee dahn!" cried Billy, in a voice which would

have convinced any dog that ever stepped. "Lig thee dahn, I tell thee!"

The terrier grew still more inquisitive, till Tim reproved him. "What, would'st tamper wi' th' legs o' justice," he said. "Nay, Flick, tha mun niver so misbehave thyseln."

"I'll tell thee what, I'll throttle that dog o' thine; he's a menace to th' whole parish," said the constable, swelling to his wonted size again as Flick withdrew.

A great peal of laughter drowned his speech. The combers glanced at the little, patch-eyed terrier, with its good-tempered face and quickly wagging tail; and the notion that Flick could be a standing menace to any parish struck home to their sense of humour. Tim o' Tab's was quiet, however; he had remembered on the sudden an old tale of his father's, in which a dog and a foolish man played equal parts, and he wondered if Billy Puff was mellowed far enough to take a part in the same play again.

"It's weel enow to talk o' throttling him," he said slowly, "but he's a stronger dog than tha thinks like, Billy Puff, for all his littleness. I've knawn him pull a man clean ower a running stream, that I hev—clean ower an' on to th' bank at t'other side."

"That's a lie, Tim o' Tab's!" cried the constable. "Theer war niver a man born so little that Flick here could pull him ower."

"Well, he was littlish," Tim admitted; "but th' dog pulled him that easily he hedn't to use half his strength. Now tha'rt a big un, William," he went on, with a careful scrutiny of the constable; "theer's none 'ud

deny tha'rt a big un—but for all that I've a fancy Flick could just manage thee."

The constable set down his mug and looked at Tim o' Tab's; then he wiped the froth from his lips, with one red hand. "Tha'rt lying, Tim o' Tab's," he said, with grave deliberation.

"Well, then, I may be or I mayn't be; but I tell thee what I'll do, Billy—I'll bet thee a barrel o' ale on't."

The other jumped at the chance of winning the coveted measure so easily. "An' I'll hod thee to't," he cried, "ay, I'll hod thee to't; an' all here is witness to a fair bargain."

Some of the combers, remembering the old tale, read Tim's meaning; the rest took it for granted; and a chorus went up, "Ay, we'll witness it."

"I tell thee what," said Tim, after a pause, "we'll hev a laking-day by an' by, just to clinch our bargain wi' Maister Royd, an' we'll meet i' Hazel Dene; an' Flick yonder shall pull William across t' beck, as sure as I war born i' Marshcotes parish."

"We'll hev a laking-day by an' by," repeated the constable, with a heavy laugh, "an' one o' us shall addle a barrel o' ale; ay, for sure—but it willun't be thee nor thy dog, Tim o' Tab's."

CHAPTER XIII

A RUFFLER'S WOOING

DICK BANCROFT of the Heights rode out to the wooing. A good leg he had, a jauntily secure seat in the saddle; and his face would have been named handsome in any other parish but this of Marshcotes. Up here, however, they asked for much in a man's face before they praised it—wanted such qualities, of strength and knottiness and jaw-breadth, as Bancroft of the Heights could never compass. Good there was, and bad, in the face, with its straight, thinnish nose, its pointed chin, its woman's sort of mouth—good and bad, yet not enough of either to satisfy the captious Marshcotes critics.

As his face was, so the man showed himself. He drank and gambled and ruffled it up and down the country-side, yet scarcely with his whole heart in the business; a little afraid of his skin at all times, he was looked upon as one who rather aped to be a moonrake than felt the real old stuff working in his veins. Let a man be good, or let him be wild as the wind of heaven, said the moor-folk, as they shook their heads over young Bancroft; but let him show strength in the doing, whichever road he chose. And so, time and time, said bluff old Parson Horrocks, who came of

too old a hill-breed to cut his fixed opinions according to his cloth.

Not that Bancroft of the Heights had any sort of care of his neighbours' opinion as he rode out to Wynyates this evening. His heart was blithe, and warm with the thought of Mistress Barbara's beauty; his mind was cool, and busy with reckoning up the old Squire's wealth. Ay, luck was with him, as it had ever been! The money apart, he was deep in love with Barbara's bonnie face; yet, without the lands and the guineas that would one day be hers, he could no more look to marry her than he could meet his creditors.

"What are the odds?" laughed Bancroft, as he cantered smoothly through Ling Crag village, and down toward Wynyates. "They can beggar me to-morrow, if so it please them. Ay, but this is to-day, and much may be done in a day. These rascal lawyers will sing to a different tune when I tell them that the heiress of Wynyates lies tame as a cushet in my hands. Hi, there! A measure, a measure," he broke off, in his swaggering style, as he stopped in front of the Friendly Tavern.

The landlord came out with a brimming cup of rum. "I drink to the luck that is coming," laughed Bancroft of the Heights, as he tossed a coin into the empty cup and handed it back again.

"So sure as all that, is it?" muttered the host, watching the gallant racket down the road. "Well, I war niver by way o' being sure of owt i' this life, myseln, an' it's ill-luck to start wi', to my thinking, is making a brag an' a boast on't."

Mistress Barbara, meanwhile, was walking in the high-walled garden that stood just across the road from the grey old house of Wynyates. A fragrant and a quiet place it was to-night, with the sun going down toward the spur of moor beyond, with the bees making a lazy stir among the auriculas and cowslips and London pride, and the throstles fluting it bravely from the blossom-weighted pear-trees. Softer and softer, as the sun westered, grew the light upon the weather-streaked thatches of the beehives, set all along the southern wall. More softly, too, the garden odours crept abroad. Here was a bush of lavender, and there a fragrant clump of lads'-love and of lassies'-love commingled; and the wind caught up the tangled scents, and ran once again to the camomile and sweet marjoram beds in the corner, and returned to Mistress Barbara's side with all its laden sweets.

The girl laughed idly at the wind-sport and the throstles; for this was the Ling Crag summer, and it behoved all children of the moor to laugh while opportunity was theirs. Not gay at all is the wonted humour of these uplands; and their summer is, like a grave man's smile, a wondrous deep and tender thing to look upon.

"The peonies will blow in a few more days," said Mistress Barbara, as she stooped to pinch the bulging, pink-white buds between a dainty thumb and white forefinger. And then she glanced at the row of hives, and from them to the upper branches of the apple-trees. There was a pleasant spice of duty mingled with this idle garden-walk, for Tim o' Tab's had prophesied,

with a great air of certainty, that there would be at least one swarm of bees this May, after so long a spell of right king's weather; and Barbara, whose especial care the bees were, was not minded to let a swarm cluster and fly away again for lack of watching. True, the hour was wearing late, but the soft light upon the thorn-trees and the apple-boughs grew bright upon the sudden, with that last brilliance before gloaming-tide which sometimes tempts the bees to swarm. Bancroft of the Heights, riding down the slack of the trough that lay between himself and Wynyates, could see full into the red-walled garden, and his pulse quickened; and his wayward fancy dwelt not at all on Mistress Barbara's guineas now.

"Good faith, but she is worth the winning!" he muttered blithely, as one who was sure of easy conquest. True, he had yet to ask the Squire's consent; but of that he had so little doubt that here and now he meant to press his suit, if he could persuade a wilful child to hearken.

Barbara was forgetting the bees, meanwhile, as she picked a velvet-cloaked auricula and fastened it breast-high in her girdle. "Stephen was less full of cares to-day, less full of business," she mused. "I wonder, will he leave this hard, cold trade as soon as he has made his fortune?"

A step sounded on the path behind her, and she glanced up—first, with a look of half expectancy, and then with a disdainful arching of the eyebrows.

"Good-even, Mr. Bancroft. Is father not within doors?" she said coldly.

He lifted his beaver with a pretty flourish. "Could I stop to enquire, when I had seen his daughter in the garden?"

"I cannot say, sir, except that you had business, so I thought, with father, and that you might have cared to get it done with before supper-time."

"My business is to give you birthday greeting. Will you accept so much from me?"

"Many thanks," said she, with a curtsey. "Oh, see, see! you must help me, Mr. Bancroft," she broke off, pointing to the gnarled thorn-bush in the corner. "I do not know how long they may have been there; we must be quick, indeed we must."

Following the direction of her forefinger, Bancroft saw what looked like a heavy bunch of grapes depending from one of the outstanding thorn-boughs. The bunch swayed slowly with the breeze, and on the outskirts of it he could see the vanning of countless busy wings; and he realised that this wooing of his had been interrupted by no more serious matter than the swarming of a hive of bees.

"The bees can wait," he growled.

"Ah, but they cannot! A swarm in May is worth a load of hay, as any Ling Crag gentleman should know. I could not forgive myself if I let so rare a chance go by."

Mistress Barbara had turned already, and there was real eagerness, and a very business-like attention to the details needful, as she ran to the garden-gate and out across the courtyard.

"I want some honey, Martha—quick!" she cried,

running into the cool, oak-raftered kitchen, with its brave sheen of pewter on the walls and its rows of cups on the polished dresser.

"Oh, ay—an' honey is fine an' sweet, when it serves to lead doubting gentry to the hive," muttered Martha drily, as she bustled to the great jar standing on the lowest pantry-shelf. For she had heard young Bancroft's horse taken to the stables, and had watched the gallant disappear into the garden, and had formed her own conclusions, as any sensible woman had a right to do.

But Barbara was far too full of the present matter to remember any gentry, doubting or passionate. She squeezed a fair measure of honey into a bowl, stirred water into it until the mixture was to her liking, then ran back to where Bancroft of the Heights was moodily watching the hanging swarm of bees. Very curious was the sight, to one who had less pressing matters on his mind than a love-declaration. The queen bee hung bravely to her twig; her subjects, in their sober, workmanlike livery of brown, had fastened themselves, as many as could contrive, to this sovereign of their little kingdom, while the rest hung down, layer after layer, each clinging to his brethren above.

Mistress Barbara went to the long stone seat that hugged the southern wall, and turned an empty hive on end, and spread the liquid honey on its sides; then motioned to her moody cavalier that he should carry it to the thorn-bush. "Now tap the bough gently, and I will hold the hive in place," she whispered. "And be careful, Mr. Bancroft, for all depends on us."

Bancroft, impatient and angry, was inclined to spoil all by shaking the bough over-roughly; but fear of the resulting bee-stings, and dread of the little lady's scorn, put him in a soberer humour. He tapped the bough; the bees dropped, compact and silent, into the wide mouth of the hive, and Mistress Barbara lowered it then to the square of rough matting which she had placed in readiness upon the grass. Bancroft was allowed no further share in this adventure now, for she put one hand beneath the hive, rested the other lightly on the thatch, and so carried her captured swarm in triumph to its proper slab.

"Mr. Bancroft, was not that well done?" she cried, turning to him with a merry, glancing colour in her cheeks. "It is the first time I have hived a swarm, and Tim o' Tab's laughed so stupidly when I told him that I meant to try—as if, indeed, a woman's hands were not like to be better in the conduct of so delicate a matter."

"Tim o' Tab's," growled Bancroft, whose one aim was to commence his wooing soon as this wayward lass would let him; "Tim is the sorriest rogue in all the parish, and right glad I was to see him safely housed in stocks yestermorn."

"Were you, indeed?" cried Barbara, with sudden heat. "I was as sorry as could be, and so was father, and so was Parson Horrocks."

"He leaves the Squire's game alone, at anyrate," said Bancroft; "and the Parson has not so much as a pheasant to be stolen; but we of the Heights have no good cause to bless Tim o' Tab's."

"Why, no," said Barbara demurely; "'twas on the Heights land that I learned to net, and snare, and—"

"*You?*" he cried, staring open-mouthed at her.

"Oh, it was in your father's time, and I was very, very little then. You did not know that Tim and I were friends before I reached his elbow—that it was I who always ran into the kitchen, when Tim called at the Hall about father's business, to see that the maids gave him the best of everything to eat—that sometimes I would slip away with him, and learn the mysteries of a double-looped wire, and the way to dust a field with parsley-seed, and—"

"We waste a perfect evening in discussing Tim o' Tab's," said Bancroft, coming nearer to her.

Barbara, not guessing what he had in mind, yet vaguely troubled by his manner, moved abruptly to the gate. "The evening is all but over, Mr. Bancroft," she said.

He followed her across the courtyard and into the parlour; and Squire Cunliffe, dozing over a glowing fire of peats, was roused by a clear voice at his elbow, "Father, here is Mr. Bancroft. Am I so very late for supper?"

The Squire started out of his doze and rubbed his eyes. But Mistress Barbara was gone, and only Bancroft of the Heights stood by his side—Dick Bancroft, looking vexed a trifle, and less at ease with self than was his wont.

"Welcome, lad," cried the old man, with the never-failing heartiness that bade all comers eat and drink their fill at Wynyates. Yet, a moment after, he fixed a

keen eye on young Bancroft, and wondered what little Barbara and he had found to talk about together in the garden.

Bancroft said little until supper was well through, and Barbara had left them to it, with a kindly good-night to her guest. The wine—though the Squire drank sparingly, as his custom was—passed more freely then, until at last young Bancroft warmed to a sudden resolution.

"There is a matter I should wish to broach, Squire," he said half-jauntily.

The Squire inclined his head. "I am at your service, Mr. Bancroft," he answered.

"I love your daughter. Am I free to tell her so?"

Squire Cunliffe pushed his chair back from the table. He filled his glass afresh, contrary to all rule, and drank it off. His kindly face grew stern. The moment had come at last, then—and had found him as wavering of purpose as ever, though he had long expected it. Well, he did not care over-much for the lad, yet there was naught grave against him; and at all costs the little lass must be spared from experience of such bitter degradation as he had lived with these ten years past. If it had been Stephen Royd, now—if Stephen could have come with hands clean of trade and as fair a rent-roll as young Bancroft's! But it was useless to give way to fancies. The lad was well enough, and able to give his daughter the comfort she had known at home—nay, more. What was amiss with his proposal?

Still the Squire did not speak. He seemed to be

weighing some matter in his mind, some cross-wayed matter that was hard to settle, and when he spoke, it was hard to credit that this man of the few cold words and shrewd outlook upon his daughter's happiness, was one with the courteous, stately gentleman whom moor-side gossip named over-tender for this rough world.

"I may give 'yes' or 'no' to that," he said at last. "They say in Ling Crag and Marshcotes that my little maid will be rich one day; and wealth is apt to tempt men, as you know."

"It has no temptations, Squire, for me," broke in the other hotly. Only the softer side of his regard for Mistress Barbara was with him now, thanks to her smiles and the wine's cogency; nor did he any way doubt his honesty in the assertion.

"Forgive me, but a father asks more than an idle speech or so when his maid's happiness is in question. What of your power to give Barbara all that she has learned to look for?"

"My land should be warranty, sir, for that," said Bancroft quietly. It was scarcely a propitious time, he thought, to show the wrong side of his affairs to Squire Cunliffe.

The other looked him through and through. "I would make Barbara penniless to-morrow," he said, "rather than see her wedded for her wealth."

"Try me, Squire. Though she came to me with nothing, I should still be the happiest man in Marsh-cotes." Bancroft of the Heights had a memory that could slip lightly through unpleasant matters; he had half forgotten already that his lands, as he called them,

were worth little more to him than a few sheets of lawyer's parchment. This sudden gravity and sternness of the Squire's had taken him by surprise, and his one thought was to convince the old man of his love for little Barbara, a love which just now was passionate enough.

Again the Squire smiled in the grim fashion that was so little like him. "Have a care, lad! It is easy to make a hot speech, and easier still to rue it. Is it, in sober truth, all one to you whether Barbara has much or little?"

"No, it is not all one!" cried Bancroft impetuously. "I had rather she came to me with nothing in her slim white hands."

Squire Cunliffe gave him another straight glance, and nodded approvingly; then checked a curious flush, as of shame, that was creeping into his face. "There is my hand on it," he said. "Win her if you can, and I will do the little possible to bend a wayward lassie's fancy," he said.

It might have been an hour later that Bancroft of the Heights rode through the moonlit courtyard, with the Squire's cheery good-night still in his ears and the Squire's promise in his mind. It was not his way to look for beauty beyond a maid's face or the inside of a flagon; yet to-night he turned his head twice for another glance at the old Hall, brooding grey and still above its memories of dead passions, dead crimes, old love-tales that had long been told. The strip of garden underneath the windows, flanked by its round-topped wall—the horsing-steps—the dim mass of barn and

mistals and stables that slept at the far end of the courtyard—all these had a word for Bancroft to-night —a new and tender word, though every line of the old place was known to him.

"It is a bonnie spot," muttered Bancroft, as he set his nag to a trot; "and I shall own it one day," added that cool, prudent mind of his, which seemed to have no communion with his heart.

Squire Cunliffe fastened the heavy door after his guest was gone. The light of the candle which he carried in one hand showed a grave face, and an older, than that which a moment since had smiled a farewell at Bancroft of the Heights; but he smoothed out the lines of trouble as he went into the parlour and found Barbara there, her head bent low above the book that was resting on her knee, so that she could better catch the firelight.

"What, reading by firelight? You'll tire your eyes, lassie," said the Squire, setting down his candle.

She looked up with a quick smile. "It was scarcely dark until a half-hour since, and then it seemed too late to light the candle, father."

"Well, I did as much in my own young days, though there were fewer books to tempt one to spoil one's eyesight. What were you reading?"

He was walking up and down the room, with a preoccupied and restless air that Barbara knew.

"Miss Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*," she answered, holding up the book.

"Yes, yes," the Squire murmured, with an effort to bring back his thoughts; "a quiet tale, and a restful.

There is healing in such books, Babette, for life itself was never yet as restful."

Barbara lifted her face till the peat-glow shone full upon it, showing the serious eyes and the half-grave, half-smiling lips.

"But I do not like it, father," she cried, shaking her head decisively. "There's so little in the story—so little movement, so little life of any sort. See, I've read all but the last few pages, and I've found them all alike—a little dreary, a little studied, and nothing but talk—nothing in the world but chatter such as our farm-girls would disdain—at the end of all one's trouble."

The Squire smiled gently down at her eager face; she was young and he was old, and he realised afresh how deep a valley, of sorrow, hunger, restlessness—all that made up experience, with its late-ripening crop of dead-sea fruit—lay between them. She was young, this child of his, and she saw in action a refuge from life's prison-round; but he was old, and he told himself that action of the sort she craved led only to the same late-ripening crop of dead-sea fruit. For the Squire was weary beyond faith to-night, and further weariness awaited him, he knew, before the dawn should rise above the Wynyates gables.

"You'll learn one day to like the quietness best," he said. "Quiet is a poppy-land, Babette, and books like these bring the same sleepy sense to one."

"But, daddy, there's never a midnight scamper, never a breath of the wind in one's face, from the first page to the last. I cannot live for a day without the

wind; I cannot find life in a book unless the sky is big above it, unless there's the breadth of the hills and the sweep of a far-off sky-line to make the people in it *live*."

Again the Squire glanced down at her; and across his own worn face there passed an after-light from the days that had seen his youth and all its bravery. He had scarcely understood till now how quick the Cunliffe blood was in little Barbara's veins. Once on a day he had known women from the outer world, and had learned something of their fashion; but Barbara had been reared in this lone upland house, had spent her childhood and her youth here, in the world that some call narrow and others wide—the world that had the long line of heath and sky for boundary, and a grey house, with all its intimate associations for central point. She had not the womanhood only, but something of the manhood too, of the bygone generations in her blood; the grey old house, with its gables and its gardens and its guardian moor—the nooks and corners, the very knots and pattern of the grain in the oak wainscoting—the wild legends of the country-side, the tangled web of hate and passion, that clothed the bare hill-fields—all were a part of her by this. They were the hearth to which she constantly returned to warm herself after the breath of the naked moors had blown about her. She would go further than he had done, the Squire told himself; she had more of the wind in her, and to the end she would blow as she listed, never tiring on her path.

" Then there's so much talk here of marriage, daddy

—always marriage," she went on, laying a hand upon her book again. "I think it rather wearies me."

"Barbara," said the Squire, coming to a sudden halt and watching the peat-glow on her face, "what if I told you that a suitor has come to ask me for my little girl?"

Her face had been turned to him, but she bent it now above her book. She had no thought of Bancroft, though he had lately sat in earnest converse with the Squire; in a flash her mind went back to that February night when she had sung at the spinet yonder to Stephen Royd, and had learned the true way of her heart. Then she thought of to-day, and of the strange glance which Royd had given her at parting. She knew not what she hoped, nor what she feared—only that the uncertainty was sweeter than anything which life had offered her as yet.

"Why are you silent, child? Is it nothing to you that Mr. Bancroft seeks your hand?"

"It—it is not that, father," she answered, still keeping her head bent.

"There! I have been over-sudden, and you are startled. You need fear nothing, child; when Mr. Bancroft asked me for your hand I bade him come to you about the matter by and by—and if he could gain your consent, I told him he should have my own."

She lifted her head now. "Mr. Bancroft?" she echoed, in low, unhappy tones. "Mr. Bancroft? I do not understand, father."

"Did you not guess what his errand was to-night? He has asked me, more than once, to give consent to

his suit, and I have always bidden him wait until your birthday. And now your birthday's here, Babs, and—and Bancroft has my good wishes, all my good wishes, unless you let some whim step in between you."

"Father, it is no whim that makes me draw back from Mr. Bancroft. He—he is scarcely—"

"Scarcely one of ourselves? That is on the surface, child, and there are reasons"—the old man stopped embarrassed, and fidgeted with his snuff-box. He could not confess the true reason of his desire to bring about the match; he could only talk, in quiet persuasive tones, of his own wishes, emphasising again and again the fact that his heart was set upon the match. Barbara answered little; nor did she say anything, when he had bidden her sleep over it and give him her answer on the morrow, except that she would do his bidding. Squire Cunliffe, after he had kissed her, turned with an air half guilty and half relieved. He went down the passage and into the room where they had lately supped. One flagon of wine was emptied but three parts or so, and this he locked up in the great oaken press, as any over-careful housewife might have done. He stayed awhile by the hearth, taking a pinch or two of snuff from the box on the mantelshelf and muttering to himself; put out the candles—all save the one he carried—closed and locked the door—went all through the house to see that every room was securely fastened—and, last of all, moved to the decrepit side-door that opened on the farm-yard.

He put his hand on the key, but it was to unlock the door this time, not to secure it. His step, as he passed

into the moonlight, was gentle, cautious, as though long habit of concealment had given it practised deftness. He crossed the yard—a tall, broad figure of a man, with stately carriage and head thrown back a little, as if to look the world between the eyes. A barn-owl, blinking at the moon from the gable opposite, greeted him with a solemn "To-wit, to-woo!" And the Squire half nodded at the bird, absently; for the brown owl and he had met each other too often by moonlight or by starlight to be other than close friends. Straight the Squire had been till now; yet he seemed to bend, to grow older and weaker in a moment, as he moved to the foot of a ladder set against the wall and mounted it.

"To-wit, to-woo!" screamed the owl, as Squire Cunliffe disappeared within the gable-door. No other sound broke the stillness, save now and then a cry of grouse or curlew from some far-off corner of the moor; no other sound, unless a watcher from the yard below could catch the light movement of feet across the gable room above. Then, on the sudden, there came a clatter, as of heavy metal dropped by a weary or a careless hand; and after that the old death-like silence, scarce lessened by that constant walking to-and-fro across the boards above.

Tim o' Tab's came over the stile that lay between the farm-yard and the moor. He stood awhile at the foot of the ladder, and peered up at the light that filtered through the cracked and weather-smeared glass.

"Poor Squire!" he muttered. "Nay, it fair goes to th' heart of a graceless loon like myseln to see sich

goings on, an' niver be able to stir so mich as a finger-tip to help him. Lord save us, but I wonder how he lasts—an' him so spruce an' full o' spirits whativer time o' day ye chance on him."

The owl, disliking Tim's intrusion, screamed volubly from the gable end.

"Well, tha'rt reet, old owl," said Tim; "'tis time I looked to them snares on Maister Bancroft's land. So gooid-neet, Squire, an' luck go wi' ye."

Tim o' Tab's glanced once again at the upper window, sighed impatiently, and disappeared, as by magic, into the moon-haze of the moor.

But the house of Wynyates still slept on, grey and tranquil; too many secrets it had in keeping to let a good night's rest be spoiled by the knowledge of this last mystery of all. Only the barn-owl was wakeful—the owl and old Squire Cunliffe.

Barbara, meanwhile, had been vaguely conscious of the Squire's movements below her, though she heard the creak of the old boards under his footfall, the rattle of the wine-decanter as he replaced it in the cupboard, as if such sounds were very far away, remote from present interest. She had closed her door, had passed the dainty bed, with its carved woodwork and its curtains of white muslin, and had seated herself at the wide-open window. If she could not get out on to the heath when trouble pressed, she must sit at the open window and feel the moor's cool breath upon her cheek.

To-night, though, there was comfort nowhere; not in the warm lush fragrance of the gathering summer; not in the glamour of young moonlight glinting on the

dew-tipped leafage; not in the landrail's never-resting night-song, which rarely failed to wake a score of gracious memories. All was perplexity; for duty was at war now with her own right judgment. Her very thoughts drew back from Bancroft of the Heights, now that they met him at such close quarters. How could she marry him? How could she?

"Father, it is not right! You should never have asked it of me, never!" she cried, with a fierceness that left her, soon almost as it came, to the old sense of doubt and difficulty.

Again, as she sat beside the casement—the leaded panes of which looked out upon the mistal-yard—she heard a footfall on the floor beneath, and after that the opening and the shutting of a door.

Instinctively she grew alert. It was habit with her by this time to watch over her father's goings and comings, and her love for him, protecting, anxious, all but motherly, still held first place, or seemed to do. She knew what was meant by that opening and shutting of the door; and that the Squire was minded to spend another night in toil.

Soon there came the flicker of flint on steel, and then a shaft of candle-light shone out across the yard from the one narrow window of the room above the laithe. A great longing came on her to know the nature of his occupation—to know it, not for curiosity's sake, but to the end that she might help him in some way. He was so lonely, and yet she wished to be more than a fair-weather friend to this father who had been all in all to her, if he would but share his secret with her.

All in all? Yes, he had been that, until Royd heard her sing her heart out to him one night not long ago. And she was to marry Bancroft of the Heights? Not her heart only, but her pride, revolted from him; yet never until now had she understood how close was the bond between the old Squire and herself. She might revolt, she would revolt for awhile; the idea was intolerable as yet; but something told her that in the end —unless some chance undreamed of came to free her— she would yield to the wishes of the man who was working yonder, in loneliness and gloom, through the nights that she was wont to spend in quiet sleep.

"Poor father! Poor, poor daddy!" she whispered, her eyes full of tears.

And then she turned away, and turned again, and, "It must be as he wishes," she said, "as he wishes— and yet I *cannot*." Again a wave of passionate rebellion swept over her. "It is too much to ask! I cannot."

Little by little the thought of Stephen Royd crept in; little by little, not knowing that she did it, she began to set him side by side with Bancroft, and to measure the stature of the two. Then with a sudden longing, that was almost fierce, her heart went out to Royd, went out in its perplexity and loneliness and asked his help. Surely, surely she could marry none but Stephen, if he needed her; and if he did not—why, then, she was not meant for any other man. Barbara was humble to-night, sincere with herself and unashamed of it. For she had read that one masterful glance of Royd's as she stood beside him in the mill-

yard that afternoon; and it had made many a dark matter clear.

For awhile she stood there, dreaming, while the corncrake plained without among the meadow-grass, and the wind came stealthy from the moor, and the sickle moon looked down on her from over the grey roofs of the mistals.

The candle-light from out the old Squire's work-room was striving still with the young moon's quieter radiance.

"Have I been busy with my own discontent?" she murmured, after a long silence. "Nay, daddy! I must show a braver heart, I think."

CHAPTER XIV

HOW THE SUMMER TURNED TO RAIN

STEPHEN ROYD, returning from Colne at five of an afternoon in early July, drew rein at the Herders Inn, as he had done five months ago and more. His thoughts had been busy with his own prosperity, with Barbara, with the house that must surely be his own before the year was out; and a kindly impulse moved him to stay for a gossip with Lavrock, and to inquire if things were going better with his friend of other days.

"I've come for a crack, Lavrock," he said, finding the landlord in the bar.

Lavrock glanced shrewdly at him; he had not heard such a hearty ring in Royd's voice this many a day.

"An' I'm glad to see ye, Maister Royd," he answered. "I've time an' to spare for talk, more's the pity."

"So times grow worse instead of better, eh?"

The other was silent for awhile; he was a proud man, Lavrock, in his way, though shiftless, and he did not trust his voice when he had to speak of his own failures.

"Maister Stephen," he said at last, reverting to the name by which he had known Royd long ago, "Maister Stephen, I niver axed to share yond Cunliffe luckless-ness I've telled ye on so often; but I share it all th'

same. There's Wyecollar Hall down yonder, empty o' all save mice an' rattens; an' I look at my own life, an' theer's th' same pictur—nowt but mice an' rattens, an' gooid stuff gone to ruin. I can't tell how it is; I war a proper man o' my hands once, an' I've followed my inn, an' followed my farm, as weel as I knaw how to—an' what's at th' end on't? An ailing wife, an' starving childer, an' a meal-bin as empty as our bellies. Ye loaned me a matter o' fifty pund i' th' fore-end o' th' year, if ye call to mind."

Royd nodded. "No matter of the loan, Lavrock; call it a gift, for old times' sake," he said, in a kindly voice.

"It'll hev to be, I'm feared—for it's goan. It stopped a gap for awhile, an' then it war swallowed up i' debt. Nay, it's Cunliffe luck, I tell ye, Maister Royd; an' it sticks like limestun muck to them as is cursed wi't."

Royd's mind went back in a flash to that night at Wynyates, when Barbara Cunliffe herself had voiced the self-same superstition; and, because of this, he held back the mockery with which he would have met avowal of any such belief.

"But you're no Cunliffe, Lavrock," he said; "why saddle yourself with it?"

"A tired horse doesn't saddle itseln," answered the other drily. "It feels th' girths tightening, an' it sees no way to help it. Mebbe I niver telled ye I war foster-brother to owd Squire Cunliffe up at Wynyates? Ay, though he looks an owder man nor me. An' I've getten it in me, Maister Stephen—th' Ghostly Rider, an' th' lucklessness, an' th' moan of a dreary wind through

empty passages—they're all bred i' th' marrow o' me, an' it's no use thinking to stand up agen 'em."

"Come, come, you're out of heart with worry, and you live over lonely, Lavrock. There's no bottom to this talk of lucklessness, or why should the Squire himself be prosperous?"

"They say he is, an' I knaw nowt to th' contrary; but ye mark my words, he'll fall under th' load one day same as I hev done. Even now he's getten a darkish secret i' his life, an' that doesn't look so fearful like prosperity. An' when he rides by here, as he does time an' time, an' stays to drink my health i' his proud upstanding way, I look varry narrowly i' his face, an' I can see it getting owder—owder nor it's any right to be. I can see summat else there, too."

Royd, despite himself, was interested. So assured, so leisurely, so quiet of speech, was this keeper of a moor-top tavern; and he talked of the unseen things as other men talked of wool-packs, cloth, and such like palpable commodities.

"You were reared on silence, Lavrock, and it breeds dreams," he said. "Squire Cunliffe looked in hale good health when last I saw him—and that was yesterday, as he rode home from Quarter Sessions."

"Ye hevn't th' eye to read sich matters, Maister Stephen; ye niver hev hed, or ye'd be poorer nor ye are to-day. There's a colour i' a man's face—sometimes it comes sooin, an' whiles it comes late i' life—but it's no more to be mista'en nor th' colour o' yond gate. Illluck grey, we call't, an' Squire Cunliffe hed it t'other day as clear as iver I seed it. Mistak it? Not if ye've

once seed it? I seed it i' th' face o' Squire's father th' day afore he deed—he war killed hunting, ye'll call to mind. I seed it i' my brother's face—him 'at lived near neighbour to Parson Horrocks—afore he deed o' th' Black Fever."

"He is dead?" put in Royd, with ready sympathy. "I am sorry, Lavrock."

"Ay, he's goan, an' his little lass, an' all. *She* war killed wi wark, poor bairn—came home fro' Goit Miln, she did, two neets ago, an' dropped at her mother's doorstun; an' my brother's wife came running out to see what ailed her; an' she oppened her een once, an' smiled i' a weariful way, an' she says, 'I'll niver hev to waken, mother, ony more,' says she. An' wi' that she gi'es a sigh, an' turns her face to th' floor, an' dees. It's a bonnie trade, is wool, Maister Royd, an' I oft wonder what Jasper Royd, your father, wod say to ye if he war quick aboon ground."

Royd let the rebuke go by him. He saw, as clearly as if it had happened yesterday, the figure of a child, swaying and stumbling up the road that led from Goit Mill to Marshcotes; he heard again the sad refrain, "Is't time to waken, father?" as Parson Horrocks swung her to his saddle; and now, it seemed, the child was dead—dead, after months of such journeyings from Goit Mill. And he, meanwhile, had been bending all his energies toward money-making; he had been coveting house and lands, while the ambition of his neighbours was narrowed to the one fierce strife for bread.

"I stopped a strike some few weeks back, Lavrock," he said abruptly. "They listened to my talk, and found

it to their liking. Why did they not rather knock me on the head, for good example's sake?"

"Because ye've a heart i' your body, an' they knaw ye're better nor your trade. Ye'll hev to quit it by an' by, Maister Stephen—ye're a bad pair, when all's said, to run i' harness."

Royd was already ashamed of his quick outburst. To-morrow—nay, to-night—when he was back amongst it all, he would return, he knew, to the old singleness of purpose, the old deafness to suggestions that weakened his ambition. His work in the world was to win back the Heights—not for himself only, but perhaps for Barbara too.

"I'd a heart once on a time, Lavrock," he said brusquely; "but it hampered me after I left the old home, and I threw it down by the wayside. Well, I must be jogging. Bring me something for the good of the house, and let my nag have a sip of meal and water."

The landlord looked to the horse's needs first, according to the complexion of his mind; and while he was away, Royd paced up and down the room, wondering how he could make a certain offer to Lavrock without injury to the older man's self-respect. For success, whether he admitted it or no—success, and the hope of Barbara—was finding a hidden vein of kindliness in Stephen Royd.

"Lavrock," he said, as the other came in again with his lackadaisical, long stride, "if things go well with me, I hope one day to get a bit of land again."

"I telled ye as mich just now; an' I'm glad to hear it," said Lavrock, setting down a measure of rum.

"You know the way of sheep, and beasts, and upland pasture-grass. How if you came to me and rubbed my memory bright on all these points?"

The man's whole face and bearing changed; he had struggled hard, and the prospect of wage-earning brought his manhood back.

"I axe nowt better, Maister Stephen. To see ye i' your rightful place again, an' to hev food to gi'e my childer—nay, nay, it'd be heaven afore its time, wod yond."

"What are your debts?" Royd went on.

"Eighty pund," said the other, with a quick glance of surprise.

"I can't hope to leave trade yet, but I want to have you ready, Lavrock, against the day I come to my own again. I take your debts, and I pay you a bailiff's salary from this moment. Leave the inn, if it hampers you; keep it, if you can make it pay its way, until I need you."

"But, Maister Stephen, this is charity—just charity."

"Go to the deuce, Lavrock! You taught me a lot of what I know, and there's no charity between old friends. You're down, I'm up—it's all the throw of a coin."

"I willun't tak it!" said Lavrock stoutly. "I'll come to ye as bailiff, an' be glad on't; but I've not fallen to charity yet."

"You'll do just as I please," said the other coolly, as he drank off his measure and laid a coin on the table.

"You'll come to me at Hazel Mill to-morrow—as my bailiff, you understand—and I'll dress your jacket for you if you don't."

Stephen Royd would have been the first to sneer at any man who gave conscience-money. Yet in a sense, and apart altogether from his real liking for Lavrock, his offer was one of conscience-money. He was richer than he need be, while others starved, and in defiance of all his own rules of prudence and of common-sense, he had made restitution when a chance of restitution showed itself; he blamed himself on the way home, as his way was, but he left one man the lighter-hearted for his folly.

Five months ago he had ridden home along this very road from Wyecollar to Ling Crag, and had held his head as squarely up to meet the world—but with a certain sullen defiance that was lacking now. The peewit had been a brother Ishmael to him then; but now he listened to the larks. The very moor seemed to have altered its mind with his; the bleak sand-road no longer stretched between drifts of the melting snow and wastes of the ragged ling; heath-bells were swelling in the bud, and bracken covered many a naked face of peat, and the far hills lay in a haze of lilac warmth and dreamed of tenderness. Mile by mile, as he rode, Royd watched the moor's face, and warmed to the friendship that had softened its harsh temper in keeping with his own change of hope and of ambition. What was all Lavrock's tale of lucklessness? Man was the maker of his luck, and the ghosts that roamed through the fancies

of the hilltop folk were out of touch with the sweat of human labour and its recompense.

Yet, even as he passed by Sorrowful Water, the first quiet forerunners of a weather-change came riding the topmost surface of the pool. Its waters, clear before, grew dull and muddy for the moment; the bold reflections of rock and heathery slope were blurred as if the water were glass that a man had blown upon; the little waves got up beneath the restless wind, and widened in grey circles to the shore, and snapped at the pebbles of the beach. Royd knew the sign; in the old moor-lore this change of standing water, so vague, and so soon passed, was due to the tread of the goblin feet which ran before a storm; and sure it was that its prophecy of ill weather soon to come had never failed.

"The summer is broken up at last," said Royd regretfully, as he turned his glance to the hills, and saw that their lilac haze was changing to a wan, grey mist. "Well, we've had more of it than we could look for."

He rode forward with a shade less eagerness. The moor still held the sunlight, and the sky was still a fleecy blue; the change in all these things was rather felt than seen; but a change there was, and this comrade-land was no longer one with the horseman—one in hope, and one in present gladness. Royd felt his own humour saddened; he laughed at himself for bending so to a hint of coming rain; but he was as the long moor-generations had made him, as wind and an open sky and the shifting humours of the seasons had trained him, and he could no more escape contagion from the

weather than the lark could help singing as it rode the sunrays, or the lapwing cease to glance wailing down the vanward storm.

Rugged, unbending, and unafraid, whenever there was work to be done by hand or head; a child of the roofless hilltops, when the heart that felt gained now and then a moment's mastery over the hand that wrought; that was Stephen Royd, the land-lover turned merchant, the free man trapped in the slavery of toil; and to-night, as he reached his mill and heard the gathering wind come whispering down the dene, the old dreads of his race, grown fat with feeding on the winter storms and winter dark, came back on him and would not be gainsaid.

He stood looking up at the valley for awhile, to where, at the jagged meeting-place of moor and dene, a yellow band of sunlight pierced the clouds—the sunshine that Marshcotes Moor was to see little of for many a day to come. Then on the sudden he shook himself, as if to rid him of a burden, and led his horse to stable.

"I've not seen Parson Horrocks lately," he muttered, as he brushed the sleek roan-coat. "He'll rid me of the vapours if any man can do it. What think'st thou, lad?"

The roan turned a pair of friendly eyes on him; for the dumb things liked Stephen Royd better than did his fellow-men; and in return he favoured them with a greater measure of his confidence.

"Ay, I'll go to him," Royd went on, "and tell him

how the world is prospering with me. What ails me, to go seeing ghosts at such a time?"

He went indoors to his own frugal meal, and then set off, under a gaining moon, to cross to Marshcotes. As he went in at the gate of the Parsonage, a woman came down the steps and brushed against him as she passed—a thin little woman, with a shawl huddled close about her, despite the warmth of the summer's night. The mill-master was not quick to give charity, but there was a haplessness about the figure that took his hand instinctively to his breeches' pocket. The woman stopped, and looked at the crown-piece thrust into her hand; and her starved face lightened slowly with a sort of stupid wonder. For they said in Marshcotes that Stephen Royd was a straight man and a clean-lived; but they said also that he was a hard man at parting with his money.

"I've done nowt for't," said the woman simply.

"Done nothing?" retorted the other brusquely, for he was always half-ashamed of his own charities. "You've starved for it, at any rate, and it will buy you a full meal or two."

Her face changed again, and a wolfish, hunted look was in it as she gripped Royd's arm. "What do I want wi' your brass?" she cried. "It comes ower late, Stephen Royd; an' it's ye an' sich as ye that I've to thank for't."

He tried to shake her off, for the Royd blood resented accusation at all times. "I do not know you," he said coldly.

"Nay, but I knaw ye. Ye're a master-weaver; ye own a factory, where th' little childer are moiled an' flogged to death,—ay, ye may harden your proud face an' say ye know nowt o' sich things, but ye're tarred wi' t' same brush, all on ye. God's curse on ye, Stephen Royd! An' God's curse on all who mak their bread o' human flesh. It comes ower late," she broke off, rocking her shrunken body to and fro, and staring at the crown-piece in her palm.

Royd could not but soften to her misery. "What ails you?" he asked quietly. "There's heart even in a master-weaver, when once you get at it."

She did not hear him; her grasp had tightened on the coin, and a pitiable cunning crept into her eyes as she moved sideways off from Royd.

"'Twill go to burying th' bairn; 'twill go to buying a coffin o' gooid deal wooid," she muttered.

He put out a hand to detain her, and she, thinking that he meant to recall his gift, ran down across the gravestones, slipping and stumbling on the smooth moss as she went. Royd went slowly up the Parsonage steps, and stood awhile on the threshold before knocking; for he had come to tell the Parson of his prosperity, and this wild hint of tragedy had brought his mind back sharply to the dark under-side of trade.

"Why, 'tis Stephen! Come in, lad, and be sure of a warm welcome," said Parson Horrocks, who had come in person to answer his guest's knock.

Royd's greeting was graver than usual, however; for the memory of the scene at the gate was with him

still, and he was realising that had he had the mothers to deal with, not the combers themselves, he would have failed to avert the strike which had threatened him so short a while ago.

"There was a weary-looking body going out of your gate as I came in," he said, soon as the Parson and he were seated on either side of the hearth.

"And well might she look weary,"—the Parson's face had lost its wonted ruddiness, and there were deep lines of pity round about the mouth,—"well might she look weary, Stephen, with the tale she had to bring me."

"A tale of want?" he said coldly, because of the crown-piece he had given in haste.

"Want? Ay, bitter want, and bitterer shame to back it. Look ye, lad, I encouraged you to take to trade; I laughed with you at the scoffers, when they said a hunting chip of the Royds would never sit easy on a wool-pack; I held by you when the gentry looked askance—and, now I'm almost sorry for it."

"I am not sorry," put in the other quietly.

"Ay, but the byways of this trade? They stink, lad; and every day I live some fresh proof of rottenness seems to come to me. You deal fair, Stephen, but do you know what horrors are countenanced here in Marshcotes?"

"And more of them in Bradford, Halifax—wherever mill-roofs hide iniquities. Yes, I know some of it."

"The woman who was here with me just now—she has been proud in her time, and for pride's sake she

had carried her sorrows with a dumb tongue. But to-night she came to me because she must have human sympathy of some sort. She's a widow, Stephen, and childless now. Do you recall the night we rode from Wynyates and overtook a little lass upon the road?"

Royd glanced sharply up. "So it was Lavrock's widow who met me at the gate just now? I heard of the child's death at the Herders Inn this afternoon."

"Childless, lad, and all for sake of trade."

The Parson halted, and his voice shook a little; for he had just listened to the tale at first hand, and he remembered every note of anguish in the mother's voice as she told it to him.

"I know what you would say," put in Royd bitterly. "The old tale of overwork and under-feeding? Do you wonder, Parson, that I try to shut my eyes at times? I see too much of it, and there is nothing to be done—"

"Nothing to be done?" cried the other, gripping the arms of his chair and leaning toward Royd with passionate eagerness. "There's Wilberforce, and Oastler, and a dozen others, all crying on the housetops that it is shameful to sell black men into slavery; and they have done something. How if men get up and cry out upon this English slavery? How if we begin to clean our own dark places, Stephen?"

"They lie too close. These anti-slavery folk want more romance before they give their sympathy. I tell you, Parson, if fifty men told all there was to tell to-morrow—told it in the streets for everyone to hear—they would be named liars for their pains."

"For awhile, lad—and then the truth would make its own way, as truth always does."

"And the gently nurtured folk who sob behind their cambric handkerchiefs when they hear of the wrongs done in the West Indies—would they soil their clothes, think ye, by going through a factory? Not they. The factories lie over close—I say it again, Parson—and only the mill-owners and the poor know what goes on behind the four bare walls."

"And the parsons—they know. This widow-body who was here just now, her child has been ailing for six weeks past, but that was no excuse for idleness, for the bairn was apprenticed to its master. *Apprenticed,* lad—a word that has got a hard new meaning since men mocked God's simplicity by inventing things of wood and steel to do man's proper labour."

Royd shifted in his seat impatiently; he held another view altogether of the machinery question, and looked beyond the present squalor to the new world of possibilities that machinery had opened up. But it was useless, as he knew from old experience, to argue with Parson Horrocks on such a topic; for the Parson, liberal as he was in his outlook on most matters, was old-fashioned to a fault in others. The Parson, too—Royd could not realise this altogether—had seen those years of the last century which had been the happiest the working-man was ever like to know; he had seen the new order creep in, had seen misery and vice advance with equal steps; and he had prayed, out on the open moor with none but the night-birds and the stars to listen, that this upland parish—the cherished child

of his old age—might keep in the old, wind-free ways, and hold to the staunch old faiths that had kept Marshcotes sweet through fret and travail of the centuries.

"The old order will pass," said Royd bluntly,—"it will pass as surely as the full ear succeeds the blade."

"But the blade is mildewed, lad," answered the other, following a farming-simile that came naturally alike to the man of trade and the man of prayer. "There's no good thing can come out of the deeds the new order countenances. The children sat in the sunshine once at cottage-doors, spinning the wool; but now too many of them never see the sun—they go to work before he rises, and return long after he has set, like the poor waif whose tale I heard just now. Listen, Stephen! 'Twill do no mill-owner harm to hear such matters for the twentieth time. She had been ailing, as I said, this bairn of six, she needed rest, and good new milk, that once was at any child's command in Marshcotes here. Instead, they made her work eighteen hours out of the twenty-four in a mill that you and I both know of; her hands refused their task at last, and the overseer lashed her till the pain drove her forward once again. Her body was empty all this while of food, and when sickness mastered her, she was lashed again—lashed till the blood dripped red upon the wool at her feet. For three nights she did not come home; she was too weak to walk the two miles, and crept among the wool to sleep when the day's work was done; on the fourth night she tried to reach home, and fell at the roadside, and they brought her, cold, with the red marks of the lash on her, to her mother's cottage."

"That was the overseer's doing. The master never used the lash, I warrant," put in Royd.

The other glanced at him and shook his head; it was not like Royd to put in a false plea. "No, for the master pays the overseer to do it—and watches while it's done," he said.

Royd got to his feet and stood above the Parson. Patience had grown to be habit with him, but now and then the old headstrong spirit leaped out, the hotter for restraint.

"I have my way to make, Parson," he cried. "I have chosen my road, and I'll follow it though all the masters in the parish make trade a byword and a scandal. I know such tales are true—nay, I could tell you worse—and unless I can shut my mind fast down on them, they'll kill the work in me."

"Soft, lad," said the old Parson, growing quiet directly he saw need for it. "Not all the masters are so; there are but two, thanks be to God, in all Marshcotes and Ling Crag. It is for you, and such as you, to show that trade has its clean roads to wealth; it is for you to carry a gospel abroad—"

"You mistake," said Royd, with a quick frown, "you mistake, Parson. I am no evangelist, and if I keep my hands clean it is because to my thinking it pays to keep them so."

"Now, then, I like thee that way, Stephen," cried the other, with something of his wonted cheeriness. "You cannot quarrel with the best friend you have—and that's myself—for I will not let you; and as for your hardness—d'ye think I'd credit it? Bless me,

I am growing old, there's not a doubt of it. There's a bottle been warming by the hearth this half-hour past, and I never set a glass beside you, Stephen."

The Parson tapped his snuff-box and took a pinch before filling his guest a measure. "I need not ask if times are good with you?" he said, with abrupt change of topic, "for they name it a standing wonder that your men still work for you when all the other masters have had to whistle for their labour."

"Times are good, sir—though there's risk just now of failure with so many mills lying idle."

"What of this Booth of Goit Mill, of whom we were talking a while back? He has kept his looms going, so it seems."

"Ay, but it is rumoured there is little doing under all the show; I trust there may be—for he's deeper in my debt than I care to think of."

"Then pray that the money never comes to you," flashed the Parson. "Let yourself be beggared, lad, and be glad of it, rather than touch his ill-gotten gains. There, there! I'm all on the one string to-night, Stephen, as I said. You've heard the gossip touching Bancroft of the Heights?" he broke off, with a sudden glance at Royd.

"I hear that he seems anxious to give me a chance of foreclosing on the mortgages, if high living will ensure it. I hear, too, that he is paying court to little Barbara—and I feel tempted to laugh, sir, at his innocence in thinking he could win her."

"I, too, have heard rumours; and the old Squire, as I know, is keen set upon the match."

"Squire Cunliffe anxious for the match?" cried Royd dumfounded.

"Ay, though his reasons are as dark as Lostwithens Bog. Bancroft? I had as lief see her wedded to a groom—for his father before him was little better, and the strain has not mended with the second generation."

"There's little chance of such a wedding. Barbara is a Cunliffe, Parson, and she—"

"Barbara is a woman, Stephen, and there's no depending on her judgment. Well, 'twill do no great harm to a certain master-weaver, whom I know, if, if—"

"You think little Barbara—*our* little Barbara, whom we have watched and worshipped since her childhood—would stoop so low?" Royd cried with sudden passion.

"Not I, if you must have the truth. Rumour is growing big, and the Squire, as I said, approves the match—but it is out of question altogether."

Royd was silent, and by and by he rose to leave. Parson Horrocks, according to old habit, walked to the gate with his guest, and they stood looking out across the burial-ground.

The older man was quiet for awhile; then he turned quickly. "Do you remember, Stephen, what we talked of long ago in this same place?"

"Yes, of the men who purchased pauper children from the workhouses. Well, they are brutes, Parson, and they prosper; what then? Life is a mixture of cross-purposes, and ins-and-outs, and roads that seem to lead nowhither."

"He that harrieth the pauper to his death shall die a pauper. What, did I once say faith could have its doubts for any man? Why, then, I lied; for faith is strong and sure—faith in the reward of right-doing, faith in the punishment of such brute wickedness as defiles the moorside here."

The old man's voice was strangely deep and strangely sorrowful, but Royd was gay of mood to-night; and he would not yield to the influence that had moulded him in boyhood and in manhood. When his way showed smooth at last, was he to turn aside with nice questions as to the methods of trade—questions which he had threshed out here with the Parson so often and so thoroughly?

"That is sound business, sir," he said lightly, "as well as sound theology. He who hires pauper labour can never prosper."

"How so?"

"Contented labour is the best tool for a master—the other breaks in his hands when he most needs it."

"Stephen," said Parson Horrocks, laying a hand on his arm, "do not lay everything to a selfish cause. I love you, lad, and I would keep the deeper faith alive in you."

Royd softened to the plea, as he could not fail to do.

"When have you failed, sir? Never, to my recollection. When I brought my lad's doubts to you, you comforted me; when I grew sick at heart with work and failure, you bade me see the light ahead; you were always working for my betterment, Parson, since I recall anything at all."

"Strange that such things should be—and I remember Marshcotes when every man was his own master, and every child a willing and free labourer," murmured the Parson. "Yet now they buy the souls and bodies of little children—nay, there are middlemen in this as other trades, and he who needs labour buys from him who gets his children by the score from workhouses. Mill-masters, workhouse-masters, middlemen—they all play for their own hand, Stephen; and the workhouse, when it sells, makes a condition that one daft-witted child shall be taken off their hands with every twenty sane children. What, in God's name, chances to that one luckless imbecile? Have you ever asked yourself the question, Stephen?"

Royd shook his head. He had known that the fact was so, but he had not stopped to ask himself the question outright.

"Well, good-night, lad. It frets you, all this talk, and I have shown myself a sorry host. Come soon again, and I will show a fairer humour to you."

Yet such talks, if they fretted Royd, were also strong allies to that under-self of his which showed so rarely through the harder crust. It was by aid of such tales, indeed, that reform, so soon to come, was already growing in the dark; but neither Royd nor Parson Horrocks guessed as much.

CHAPTER XV

A COMBERS' HOLIDAY

THERE was poetry in the life of the moorside combers, and at no time more, perhaps, than when they left work for a whole summer's day and went up some wooded dene or other, with stewpot, fiddle, and barrel of October ale, to keep one of those Arcadian holidays which came so often in their lives, and which, it seemed, had need of slight excuse, or none at all, so long as their hearts were set upon the frolic.

Hazel Dene was their meeting-place this morning and the blue moor-sky looked down on them as they followed the path beside the stream—men in fustian and velveteen, matrons in sober homespun, lassies in print gowns, with stomachers of red or yellow, bairns of ten and lesser bairns of two or three or five, with red limbs showing above their rough grey stockings. Shackleton was here, forgetful altogether by this time of the knock-down blow that Royd had given him; the same lean faces, and merry ones, which had shown at the Ling Crag tavern not long ago, showed here to-day, with sunlight on them now instead of shadow, and laughter in the voices which lately had threatened to break into storm.

"It's well to be the workmen, not the masters," laughed Royd, who was standing at his door as they went by.

"Ay, time an' time—when theer's laking on; but not when pay-day comes," laughed Shackleton. "Are ye thrang this morn, Maister Royd? For we'd be fain to see ye up i' th' dene, if ye'd nobbut join us, like."

"Look for me by and by, then, Shackleton—say when your stewpot begins to simmer on the fire."

"Well, it's noan a bad hour to come in, if ye axe me; an' we'll hev summat to your liking, maister, if I knaw owt. We've earned our holiday, I reckon," he added drily. "For yond wheel wod be rare an' quiet if ye hedn't knocked one or two on us heels ower head."

"Ay, it was the only way to drive sense into you," laughed Royd, as he went down Smithbank.

He stayed for a word with most of the groups which he met on his way to Water Lane; and, to the surprise of all, this hard, grave mill-master was almost rollicking, with a memory for their intimate affairs and a kindly jest for the little ones.

"He's noan th' same man he war, isn't Stephen Royd," said one woman to another; "what ails him, think ye, to look leetsome as a chaffinch on a twig?"

"Nay, he's addling brass, they say—addling it as fast as he can oppen his pockets for't. An' if that isn't enough to mak a man leetsome, what is?"

"Well, theer's brass an' theer's content—an' I hevn't found th' two keep mich company, not I. Howsiver, we shall see what we shall see, now th' maister can tak a wife to hisseln."

"Tak a wife? Ay, he's wanted Mistress Barbara lang enew, only he war ower poor, I reckon, to keep her. Well, they'd mak a bonnie couple, choose who hears me say't."

The dene, meanwhile, was growing noisy with laughter, and the shouts of children, and the rough voices of the combers as they bandied jests one with another while making preparations for the feast to come. Beside the little brig of stone, just where the valley opened right and left up to the open moor, a half-dozen of them were piling great arm-fulls of ling and twigs and alder-branches; others were fixing the stewpot in its place, and each man as he came up threw in his contribution, of meat or bread, green-stuff or potatoes. Under the hill, where the bracken stood knee-deep and the heather budded toward flowering, three laughing fellows were broaching a barrel of October ale—Royd's second gift of the kind—and were asking one another how soon Tim o' Tab's might be looked for.

Tim, as it chanced, was coming over the hill-crest at the moment, his spindle legs showing clear against the sky; and soon, as he drew nearer, they could see that he carried a brace of hares slung round his neck, and a brace of grouse in either hand. For Tim, broad daylight as it was, looked to find none but friends in Hazel Dene this morning, and his contribution to the stewpot need pay no toll to any man.

"Here he comes!" cried Shackleton boisterously, as he struck a spark into his tinder-box and set the dried ling flaming under the heap of ling and faggots.

"Ay, an' Flick an' all, man an' dog—dang me if iver I saw two peas i' a pod more like to look at."

Tim nodded gaily from one to another as he disburdened himself of his load. Hares and grouse were speedily made ready for the pot and added to the contents of the cauldron, from which a fragrant steam was already rising into the blue, sunlit strip of sky that roofed the Dene. There was no cessation, meanwhile, from jest and frolic, until the stew was ready—in token whereof Tim thrust a great wooden ladle into the pan and began helping the women-folk as they brought their delfen platters to the fire.

"Here's Billy Puff,—he times his comings an' his goings varry weel, does Billy," laughed Shackleton, pointing down the path, round the bend of which the constable came waddling.

"He looks fearful pleased wi' hisseln," put in another. "We shall see summat, lads, when him an' Flick get started, like."

They greeted the new-comer gravely; for word had gone abroad that the terrier and the man were to decide the wager made not long since, and all knew—save Billy Puff—what the issue was to be.

"Well, Tim o' Tab's," said the big man, blowing out his cheeks, "I reckon tha'rt noan just ready to keep thy bargain.

"Ready as can be, Billy; I've getten th' rope an' all—just help thyseln to summat, to stiffen thee, like. Tha'll need it, lad, afore we begin th' match."

Billy Puff, with many protests, accepted a quart of ale; and after that he secured the half of a grouse and

fell to despatching it. "The bargain war that Flick here pulled me ower Hazel Beck," he said; "if he can, then I gi'e thee a barrel o' ale—an' if he cannot, then tha gi'es it me."

"There's nobbut one thing," went on Tim, "an' that is about th' way we fasten t' rope. Flick niver yet put out all his strength if th' man *war facing him.*"

"An' why not, I should like to knaw? It's a queerish fancy, yond, for ony dog to hev."

"Nay, it's nat'ral as cheese wi' apple-pie, when ye knaw as mich about dogs as I could tell ye, Billy. Hevn't ye iver noticed how th' look of a man's eye flairs 'em. They cannot abide it, someway; an' Flick goes weak as a rabbit when ye look him full i' th' face."

The constable, wrapped in his own wisdom, did not notice the slow smile that went from one to another of the watching groups; for although no one bore foolish Billy any malice, there was not one of them but relished seeing his folly have full bent. Tim was getting his rope in readiness by this time; and so busy was he with his task that he did not see Parson Horrocks, and the Squire, and little Barbara come down the sloping fields toward them.

The Squire was a little paler than his wont, but spruce, erect, well-gloved and booted as of old, and he swung his cane in jaunty fashion when the fiddlers drew their bows across the strings and played a tripping measure. Parson Horrocks, gay as any youngster, bowed then to Mistress Barbara, and claimed her hand,

and led the dance with her all down the strip of green, and over the wooden bridge, and back again.

"Nay, but I grow older, child! Older than a man ought to feel at my age," he cried, as they stopped under shelter of the rowan-trees.

"Then why hide the truth, sir, so shamefully?" she answered, with the ghost of her old smile.

Barbara, truth to tell, was finding it hard to show herself at ease to-day; she had a secret of her own, and one that she was loth to tell this oldest of her friends.

"And you, Tim? Where were you last night?" went on the Parson, sniffing at the fragrant steam.

"I' bed, for sure, Parson. Where should a gooid lad be?" answered Tim soberly. 'If grouse, an' hares, an' what not, will come an' lig on my doorstun—why, I mun bring 'em wi' me; but to think I find 'em on th' oppen moor—to say as mich i' face o' Squire here—nay, nay!"

"We'll have thee at the court-house yet," the Squire answered, with a shadowy smile. "Ah, Stephen, so all the world has come a-holidaying to-day," he broke off, as Royd joined the little group.

"It would seem so, sir—but then how many days have we as fair as this?"

"Laugh while we may—eh, lad? Well, 'tis sound philosophy the young men think."

"And the elders think it sometimes," the Parson cried. "Stephen, your years grow less, I think; you may one day hope to be as young as I am if you keep such spirits."

Royd's spirits fell, however, as quickly as they had risen. He had not looked to find Barbara here, and as he saw her standing, dainty and cool against the sober back-ground of the village folk, he wondered how he or any other man about the moorside could keep away from the Wynyates doorstep. Buoyant, sanguine for once of the success in trade which he had coveted, he turned to her—and found her greeting so reluctant, so discourteous almost, that even Parson Horrocks noticed it, and wondered what could be amiss between these two.

"'Tis like old days, eh, Parson?" cried Squire Cunliffe. "See the rough fellows yonder, what lightness they can put into their heels. The very constable is dancing, and so I must even follow the example set me by the parish. Barbara, your hand—and if the Parson shames me, you must remember he is my junior by a year or two."

"A fine couple, Stephen," said Parson Horrocks, watching them join the throng of merrymakers. "If Heaven had given me a daughter, and she had had a tithe of Barbara's witchery— There, there! a bachelor of my standing, lad, to be talking of such softnesses. Let us instead go see what yonder fragrant stew will yield us."

Each moment the stew was giving out new odours to the wind—a touch of hare, a whiff of grouse, a suspicion of beef, all blended into one. The sunlight strengthened, the dragon-flies began to dance above the steam, and now and then a drowsy, over-burdened bee came down the breeze. It was holiday indeed in

Ling Crag parish, and not the least merry of them all, in his grave way, was the village constable, who stood wiping the moisture from his face.

"Warm, Maister Royd, warm!" he cried. "What ails a man to go dancing till th' sweat runs down him fair like rain, I dunnot knaw; but we all seem to do't. See ye, now, ye've getten no plate, like; wod ye mak shift wi' mine afore I use it?" He brought a red-and-yellow kerchief from his pocket, from which he took in turn a knife and fork and delfen plate, and Royd thanked him as he pushed the great ladle into the stewpot, and drew out a liberal helping, which he handed to the Parson.

"It's catch what ye can, an' be sure ye get plenty on't," observed the constable.

"Ay, plenty to eat, an' plenty to drink, an' all," chimed in Tim o' Tab's, who had been slily filling his rival's mug from the barrel under the bracken-green hill. "We've getten a bit of a disputation to settle, Billy an' me—see ye, Maister Royd, here's another platter for ye, if ye've so minded—ay, we've getten a disputation, for Billy says he can pull Flick ower t' stream, an' I say he cannot."

Billy Puff laughed with easy-going contempt, and looked slantwise at Royd, as if to intimate his sense of Tim's scant-wittedness; for jests were well enough when launched at other folk, but it did not occur to the constable, vain-glorious as he was, that so important a personage as himself should be made to serve as target.

"Well, let's mak a start," said Tim cheerfully.

"Ye'll mind 'at your back's to be turned on th' dog?"

"Ay," agreed the other cordially, now that meat and drink had mellowed him, "I'll turn my back on him, an' I'll pull wi' half my strength—I'll do owt to please thee, Tim o' Tab's, though tha'll loose thy ale at th' end o' all. Ready? Ay, I'm ready, an' Parson an' Maister Royd here shall come to watch th' sport forrard."

The combers, seeing them make a move toward the stream, began to close in about them, with suspicious gravity; while Royd, whose father had told him times and again of a like jest played long ago upon a daftish fellow from over Cranshaw way, looked on with a grim smile, as he joined the Squire and Barbara on the hillslope and watched the rope fixed by ready hands, one end of it about the man's round middle, the other to the terrier. It seemed incredible that any man should be so lost to all suspicion as the constable—yet a broad grin of satisfaction was on his face as he set his legs apart and glanced over-shoulder at the dog. Flick, for his part, was solemn as his master, save where the frolic lurked in either lively eye. "Now, then!" cried Billy. "Now, then, lads! Tell yonder dog he'd best not strive ower hard or he'll burst hisseln."

"I'm feared, Billy—ay, I'm feared ye'll be owerstrong for him, now I see th' way ye shape," murmured Tim. "Howsiver, a bargain's a bargain, an' I'll hod to what I said. Ephraim, lad, do ye go an' stand fair opposite to Billy, an' keep his eyes to yond side o' th' stream; keep 'em fixed on thy own bonnie face,

Ephraim, an' he'll niver want to look ower his shoulder as he's doing now."

Ephraim did as he was bidden, and stood with his face turned toward Billy Puff's—stood and helped to form as strange a picture as Hazel Dene had ever, surely, looked upon. On one side the stream, the constable, a look of foolish satisfaction on his face, as at a victory assured, his round blue eyes fixed upon Ephraim's in a steady stare; on the farther bank, the terrier, with its wagging stump of a tail and its air of drollery; across the stream and dipping gently into the water, a rope of thickness altogether disproportionate even to the constable's weight—a rope so thick, indeed, that he might from this one absurdity have guessed that there was laughter in the making at his expense. About the combatants, on both sides of the stream, stood the clustered knots of combers, farm-wives, children; while Parson Horrocks and his friends looked down upon them from the hillside, in doubt as to the propriety of laughing at such sport, yet moved to mirth, for all that, by the constable's self-satisfaction.

"Now," cried Tim, "Flick, get to it, lad. Billy, art ready?—Nay, no lookings round, lad, or we niver shall get started."

The same willing hands that had fastened the rope, took hold of it again as Tim gave the signal—took hold of it on the terrier's side of the stream, and pulled with cautious, ever-increasing strength, and gradually drew Billy Puff toward the brink; then with a last hearty effort, they brought him full into the stream.

A great cheer went up, which was redoubled as Billy

scrambled to the bank and dashed the water from mouth and eyes; while Flick sat quietly on his haunches, with an air of effort satisfactorily made and a sense of consequence that clearly claimed the whole merit of the victory.

"Begow!" muttered Billy, with a puzzled look at the terrier, soon as his eyes were cleared a little of the water, "begow, lads, I niver could hev thowt it, niver! He pulled that hard, did th' dog, I couldn't no way— Nay, nay, I can scarce believe it yet!"

Slowly, as he emerged from his self-absorption and viewed the matter from another standpoint, his doubts increased, although the combers stood all aloof from Flick and wore an air of stolid gravity. And the more he looked at the terrier, the less likely it seemed that he should have proved the stronger of the two.

"Theer's summat wrang," he muttered; "summat grievous wrang, Tim o' Tab's—it's noan jannock, noan jannock, an' I didn't think it on ye."

"Why, what's agate, Billy? Yonder's my dog Flick an' there are ye; an' it's plain to be seed which hes won th' bet."

"He war helped, war the dog; an' I war a fooil not to—"

"Helped? He needs no help, Billy! It war wonderful, fair wonderful, to see th' way he pulled an' pulled, an' reckoned he'd niver manage your sixteen stone—an' then all i' a minute, *hoick!* An' ye war i' the watter."

Even the Squire was laughing at Billy's disordered countenance and woebegone, half-wrathful look; but

Royd did not join in the gaiety, for he had come close to Barbara's side and was watching her air of aloofness grow momentarily deeper.

"Barbara," he said bluntly, "what is amiss? It is not long ago, surely, since you came to Hazel Mill and watched the water-wheel go round?"

"It is years ago, I think," she answered, her face averted. "That was my birthday, was it not?"

"Yes, your birthday; but why should you sound as if it were the saddest of sad festivals?"

"Because—it does not matter, does it? They are sad days, Stephen, for every one of them carries us so much nearer what Parson Horrocks calls his garden."

"Oh, but this will not do, Babette!" he cried. "Look at the combers yonder—look at the blue sky and the sunshine—cannot you see a brighter side to life than the Parson's garden offers?"

"Not to-day. Please, will you—will you not ask me for my reasons? I am not ready with them, Stephen?"

Something so pleading there was in her tone, so unhappy and ill-at-ease, that Royd said no more—only touched her lightly in token of his comradeship and turned to answer some jest of Parson Horrocks'. Yet he wondered what the child could mean,—wondered, and forgot that very sunshine he had talked of, and heard the voices of the merrymakers come dull and muffled from the dene below.

"What ails her?" he kept repeating to himself, not guessing how soon he was to learn from other lips than Barbara's.

For by and by the Parson claimed his company on

the way home to Marshcotes, to share with him a dish of tea and an hour's talk over certain matters; the hour lengthened out to supper-time, as such hours were wont to do at Marshcotes Parsonage, and Stephen, who was in no mood for work, stayed on.

"It is not often I can snare thee for so long, Stephen," he said, relapsing into the "thee" and "thou" which so often slipped out to mark his feeling for the younger man; "I mean to make the most of it, you may depend on it, and there's supper enough for two, or should be. I fancy success does not suit you over well," he went on presently. "You might have lost a fortune instead of made one, lad, to judge by your grave face."

"Have you been at Wynyates lately?" asked Royd, with an abruptness that told his host as plainly as need be what was in his mind.

"Not since last Sabbath. Barbara looked sadly pale, I thought—though not one half so weary as she did to-day. Poor child! There's something on her mind, I doubt. Well, sit ye down, Stephen, for here's the supper waiting for us."

They were still at the board, and the Parson was laughing once again to think of Billy Puff's discomfiture, when there came a knocking at the outer door, and Bancroft of the Heights was ushered in. His step was unsteady, and he laughed in boisterous fashion as he came striding up to the hearth.

"The happiest man in Marshcotes, sir, has come to see you," he said, bowing first to his host and then, with courteous malice, to Royd.

"How so?" asked the Parson distantly. He did not care to see any visitor come so into his house.

"Why, little Mistress Barbara has promised to wed me, Parson. That was yestereven, and to-day, I—well, I had to drink success to a fair bargain made."

Royd turned his back on them, and stood for a moment with averted face; and then he turned again, and his face, though grey, was hard and expressionless as if he were bartering with a brother mill-owner. It was the Parson who first broke silence, however.

"I am grieved, Mr. Bancroft," he said, in his blunt way.

Bancroft stared at him. "Damme, Parson, you have a happy way of wishing well to us."

"I wish well to Barbara at all times; that is my reason for utterly misliking this match. Stand straight, sir!" he broke off, with a sudden flash of temper. "The least you can do is to come sober when you bring such news. There, there! Your pardon. You are in my own house—my guest, therefore—and I did not mean to be so harsh with you."

"It is nothing, sir," cried Bancroft airily. "So long as little Barbara is mine, I can keep a warm heart against reproach."

Again he glanced at Royd, but he surprised no emotion there.

"I congratulate you. You are more fortunate than any man in Marshcotes," said the master-weaver quietly.

He left them there, Bancroft and the Parson, and went out of the churchyard gate—out and up on to the

moor. He did not realise the blow as yet; there was a numbness on him, as if he had been struck, and he was down the dip of Hazel Dene, and over the opposite hill-crest, before the clear thought shaped itself, "Barbara is gone." This, then, was the meaning of her coldness—the coldness that so short a while ago had been warm friendship. He looked across at the long low house upon the hill, as he had looked night after night through the passing years; he saw the windowed walls of it, the chimney-stacks, the trees this side the garden-wall—saw them, for the first time, without a trace of glamour. *Barbara was lost,* his playmate of the days gone by. She had become part of the air he breathed, part of the light of sky and land; and she was pledged to Bancroft of the Heights.

Slowly, as the moor-breeze freshened down the dene, he began to understand the meaning of it, began to understand the bitterness of renunciation and the futility of work. What had he striven for all these twenty years? For the house yonder on the hill, and latterly for a mistress who should fill it. He could not foreclose the mortgages now that Barbara was to share Bancroft's fortunes. Tongues had wagged about the moorside lately touching Barbara and her suitor from the Heights, but neither Royd nor the Parson had ever given more than passing credence to them; he had seemed too slight a lover for her—yet she had chosen him. All was gone at the one blow; and Royd's faith grew empty and unmeaning.

Twenty years! It was no long time, as time was reckoned by the swart rises of the moor, by the grey

walls and benty fields; yet to Stephen Royd it seemed, in the retrospect, a time of endless strain. Twenty years of fret and toil and barter; years of high hope and bitter disappointments by the way; each season finding him with one more good step taken toward his goal, each evening—summer's dusk or winter's dark—seeing him stride up the hill-crest till he stood in sight of the old home. And all that was cut clean away from him, at a word from such as Bancroft of the Heights.

Up and up he went into the moor, and his heart was bitter as the bogland that skirted the one side of his path. Rugged, accustomed from long habit to force his way through obstacles, he could not accept this blow which, ripening tardily, had found time to gather strength; his reason cried out against it—and if, somewhere far back in the stillness of his conscience, a faint voice said that this was just, he would not listen. Barbara was gone, his chance of the Heights was gone; what was left to him to work for or to hope?

Yet he might one day come to understand—what now was dark as the moor-face itself to him—that he had worked with too single an eye to his own fortune. Uphill the road had been, but he had climbed it with sturdy hope of the reward that waited him upon the summit; he had not set himself yet to climb in search of another's happiness, not his own; nay, he was as far from any such wish to-night as was the remote, sullen line of heath; he was Ishmael once again, and the clack of the frightened grouse, the cry of night-birds from the marshes, were the voices of his own harsh mood.

Royd's evil hour was come, the time of that trial

which once and for all was to leave its mark upon his life and shape his destiny. Little by little he had been gaining kindliness of late; little by little he had felt the human sap run warm in him again. His conscience had been stirred by that crying of the children which rose up from the moor-factories; pity had intruded itself into the dry heart of his ambitions—pity, and love of little Barbara, and sense of the throbbing hopes and aches and dreads which made up life for his neighbours. He had known few dreads in his time, save that men should find him less than a Royd in all his dealings; he had been over-busy to realise that others felt the pains he lacked, and harboured terrors which were unknown to him. And Barbara and success between them had been breaking down all that, until on the sudden his summer, like the moor's, had turned to rain; and now all that was bitter in him had come once more to the front; the fight had been in vain, and there was no hilltop anywhere in view along the grey horizon of his life.

Dangerous the mood would have been in any man; in Royd it threatened to be tragic. Effort, slowly added to effort as the years passed, could be turned all to waste in a few months once the strain was slackened. The very strength that he had shown, his isolation in the little house beside the mill, were his worst enemies now; the moor, wild and rugged and untamed, no longer promised to be the friend it had been to him, for its counsel might be desperate; he had no hope from prayer, for he had measured life heretofore from

the standpoint of present needs; by his own strength he must stand or fall, by his own strength—or what he would have called his own—he must meet this blow which had come with such appalling suddenness.

None of his neighbours noted any change in him or in his habits after this first evening's communion with the moor, save that he bought a faster horse and one with a more brittle temper. Perhaps he was a little more remorseless when a bargain was in progress; perhaps his tongue was sharper toward his spinners; but that was all.

He alone knew what the change in him was, knew how fast it was progressing. Night after night he would go up into the moor, and stride on and on, past bog and peat and rush-fringed marshland—warring, always warring, with the destiny that had overturned his plans. Once in a while, however, he would grow sick of motion, and would sit brooding, after work was over, in the cottage abutting on his mill; he had built his castle of dreams, and it had crumbled; and the last thought in his stubborn mind was to question whether its foundations were built on rock or sand. He was beaten, and he would not accept plain fact; and each day his heart grew bitterer toward the world, toward himself, toward ideals of any sort.

And then a voice spoke from out the past, as it had not spoken this many a year gone by. Markedly abstemious Royd had always been, remembering his father's fate. He would drink a little with the Parson when he went to see him of an evening, but rarely

touched wine of any sort in his own house, nor felt the need of it until the time of his bitterness came to find him out.

It was late one evening, it might be a fortnight after Bancroft's suit had proved successful, that Royd, while sitting idly by his hearth, was assailed by a sudden fierce temptation. The blood of his father, and his father's father, had been held in check, and held in check, but now it mastered him; he scarcely realised the truth, indeed, until he had reached down a bottle of port from the cupboard and had poured himself a measure.

"The end of the struggle—the end—instead of the long low house upon the hill," he muttered.

He held the glass up to the lamplight, and stood there for awhile thinking, thinking. The very sight of the wine had loosened many an impulse which he had thought to be dead long ago—rough-riding impulses, such as had led his father to a suicide's death, such as had beggared many an old name about the moorside of honour and all else. He had kept them under with such jealousy through all these years that they were almost forgotten, till now they turned and mocked him from twenty hidden corners. He thought of moonlight escapades, when he and Tim o' Tab's and the Marshcotes gamekeepers were young together; he thought of revels he had witnessed at the Heights, when the bottle passed, and the wind fluted down the chimney on to the great logs of pine or beech, and madcap stories followed one the other; he remembered hunting-morns when his father's laugh had sounded clear as a

horn-blast across the rough moor-fields. And these things seemed life to him—quick life, such as he had not found among the looms, such as he might yet find again if he threw off the yoke.

"Life!" he cried, with a sombre laugh. "Life, after all these years of drudgery! And nothing to stand between—nothing, now Barbara's gone."

He stopped, and his laugh died down, and he passed a hand across his forehead. Beggared or no of all else, he had a clean name yet. Nothing mattered, maybe—but, for all that, he would face the greyness without help from wine. With a quick turn of the hand he threw his glass out at the casement, through which a mellow breeze was stealing, laden with honey from heath and close-cropped pasture lands. Then, briskly, decisively as he did everything, he went out at the door, and up the field-track leading to the Parsonage. The visit seemed strangely natural at such a time; for in boyhood's days he had always brought his troubles to Parson Horrocks as soon as they threatened to grow over-strong for him.

"You've a long face, Stephen—as long as Tom o' Smicks's fiddle," cried the Parson, meeting him at the churchyard gate and eyeing him by the light of the dropping moon.

"The times are scarcely merry, Parson, are they, for some of us?"

"No times are ever very gay, lad, if we look rightly at them. What then? They pass and leave us wiser, let us pray."

"Suppose I were weary of it all? Suppose I were

a Royd underneath all else, and that I meant to buy myself a few acres somewhere on the moors and rough-ride it with the best? My folk were fond of the bottle, sir, if you will call to mind."

The Parson gripped him roughly by the arm. "The wind sets there, does it? Come you with me, lad—see! The headstone is plain to read even by this light."

He pointed to the grave of Jasper Royd, and Jasper's son, as he caught the grey, cold glint of the moon-rays on the stone, shivered a little and was silent. Once again that last drear scene of all recurred to him, when they brought his father to the Heights, marked with the gunshot wound that had killed life and pride for him—yet had not ended it as he had wished, with no pause for understanding of his deed. They had given him Christian burial, it is true; but Jasper Royd himself would have been the first to disclaim his right to such. A sudden overwhelming pity stirred in the son's heart, a sudden sense of the finality of that one deed.

"Let us go, Parson," he said softly.

"Ay, lad, we'll go—and Stephen Royd will never again come to me with any such-like tales as the one he brought me to-night."

CHAPTER XVI

AT GOIT MILL

PARSON HORROCKS pondered for a week and more over the tidings which Bancroft of the Heights had brought him, and halted between anger and would-be incredulity; and in the end he got to horse. The sun was warm upon the rich brown of the bilberries as he rode out to Wynyates, and a light breeze touched to elfin music the last year's bells of heath. A goodly figure of a man the Parson showed. His shoulders were square to the west wind that met him face to face; his knees were firm as the saddle-leather under them; and his head was turned first to this side, then to that, with the quick interest in his surroundings which betokens the man of large, impulsive nature. Yet for all that there was a line of pain across his forehead, and his eyes had less than their accustomed drollery in them.

"We plan and we plan," he muttered once—it was when he came to the steep round of the road—"we plan and we plan—and what does it come to? And little Barbara—"

He stopped, and went forward without another word until he gained the Wynyates gate. Barbara, as it chanced, was gathering lavender from the little garden-

strip that fronted the low windows of the house; a flush of pleasure rose to her face, then went again as she saw how mirthless was the Parson's greeting. He came straight up to her and took her hands across the palings, and held them so.

"Little Barbara," he said, "you were scarce higher than that bush of peonies when first I set you on my knee. Tell me, am I to wish you well in this new life?"

Her eyes fell, but she made no effort to withdraw her hands. "I scarcely know," she faltered.

"So I had thought—so I had feared, child. You've not the look a woman has when she's happy in her choice."

She glanced at him, and down again; she was eager to defend that choice of hers, but it was useless to attempt it.

"Oh, I cannot—I cannot *lie* to you," she said at last, desperately. "Yet I've tried to be so brave. Parson Horrocks, I *cannot bear it.*"

"*You cannot bear it?* Barbara, Barbara!" The old man's voice was harsh almost in its trouble.

"Father's happiness depended on it. It seemed right, and I have promised."

"Well, and you have promised, let us say? God knows I would counsel none to break a promise—unless the keeping of it led to certain evil."

"It may lead where it will, sir; I have pledged my word," she said, with the proud lifting of her head that Parson Horrocks knew so well.

"A Cunliffe spoke there, child; and I'm glad and

sorry both. Do you realise, I wonder, all that it will mean?"

"I know it will be misery. Yet it would be greater misery to see father growing more and more infirm and troubled as the days went on. Do you not understand—I *cannot* see him suffer."

"But, child, what motive has he? Mr. Bancroft is scarcely—scarcely—"

"Scarcely the choice you would have expected him make?" finished Barbara, with a sad little smile. "I do not know—some motive he must have, for he has set his heart on it."

The Parson was silent for a while; then, "And you are determined to go on with it?" he said brusquely.

"Indeed I must; and—and some day I may grow to care for him."

"Pah!" flashed the old man, grieved to see Barbara so wistful for all her bravery. "You're not the maid I thought you if you grow to do any such thing. But there! What right have I—"

"You have the right—you have the right," she broke in. "I would listen to you gladly, sir—yet I dare not. Ah, there is father, and he will want a talk with you, I know; shall I see you at the supper-board?"

"With your permission, yes, child. You look out of heart, and an old fogey's talk may do you good."

"If talk could do me good, Parson Horrocks—if I were troubled only about the childish things with which I used to come to you—it would be so easy."

"You did not think so then, did you? Everything, Babette, seems easier than just the one trouble that we

have to bear. You broke your dolls when you were a wee bairn, and I remember with what tragedy you used to bring the news to me! And now there's a bigger doll broken, eh? A doll called happiness, or glamour, or hope. Well, bring it to me to be mended, lassie, as I used to mend the other. Ah, Squire! A fair good-day to you—as fair as Barbara here among her flowers," he broke off.

"I scarcely looked for you to-day—perhaps because I have looked for you vainly this se'nnight past. The surprise is very welcome," cried Squire Cunliffe, coming up the road.

"I came to tell Barbara that I had had news of her," said the Parson.

"And to wish her well? 'Tis kind of you to come so soon. And Mr. Bancroft? You know as well as I that he would deserve any maid in Marshcotes except my own little girl."

"Perhaps I do not know as much"—the other was beginning, then stopped in answer to a pleading look from Barbara. "Have you heard aught of Stephen lately?" he broke off, with a certain deliberate intention in the question.

"Not of late, Parson. He would seem to be busy in these latter days."

"That is a pity, surely; do you know what makes me ask the question?"

"Nay, how should I?—save that we were all close friends together once on a day, you and he and I; and it may be—"

"It may be that he needs human fellowship just

now," broke in the other,—" needs it as he never has in all his life, Squire. He is lonely, and a little disappointed, perhaps, with what his trade has done for him."

" I should be sorry for him to lack company when we can give it. You are right—yes, you are right—we have been wanting lately with regard to him, and he is more retiring than he used to be."

The Parson was honest enough in this wish that Stephen should be drawn out of his self-centred life; but he had another motive, too, though Barbara did not guess how narrowly he was watching her sudden change of countenance.

" The pity of it, the pity! " he muttered to himself, as the result of the long scrutiny.

" They tell me trade is going from bad to worse," said the Squire. " Stephen contrives to keep his looms at work, I believe,"—this with a curious shadowy smile that was gone upon the instant,—" but there are rumours of failures everywhere, and the smaller men will be ruined through the debts owing to them."

It was the Parson's turn to smile, as he thought of Royd's prosperity. " Even such small mills as Stephen's may keep going," he said. " Indeed, he has never done so well, if all I hear be true."

Squire Cunliffe sighed, with evident relief. " That is good hearing; I am glad—glad for his own sake," he said.

" And yet they are talking gravely in Ling Crag," said Barbara, coming out of a long train of thought. " I overheard the combers as I passed the inn on

Monday; one was saying that Goit Mill would soon be idle, and another wondered how it would affect Mr. Royd, to whom it owed some heavy debts. Oh, but I should be sorry, sorry, if Stephen were to lose all that the long years have brought him."

"If Goit Mill is to be silent, any man's loss of fortune will be worth while," cried the Parson. "Is the news true, Cunliffe, think ye?"

The squire raised his brows in the old disdainful way that his friends knew so well when trade was being talked of. "I do not hear much gossip about trade," he said. "We belong to an older generation, Parson, do we not? which found the last gallop, or the last cock-fight, or the richness of our crops, food enough for talk. 'Twas no good day for us when Goit Mill was built."

Yet, the master of Goit Mill, if rumour spoke truly of his fortunes, was hiding the fact under a bold front; and at the moment when Barbara first spoke of him he was giving Stephen Royd the fruits of his philosophy. It was with ever-growing distaste that Royd paid his necessary visits to Goit Mill. What was open and above board in the dealings of Ephraim Booth showed a dark face enough; but it was whispered that there were darker depths unsounded—that the iniquities done under cover of the mill-walls beggared the worst that any man could say of them. Parson Horrocks was not the only one who wondered what chanced to the hapless pauper-brats, to the hapless pauper imbecile whose body was handed over by the workhouse master like so much broken refuse, to be got rid of at any

price. The moor-folk wondered too; but when they asked their own children—the children who worked with the paupers, but lived in their own homes—these were silent touching what went on in Goit Mill; partly they were afraid to speak, and partly the weight of their own sufferings dulled them to the miseries of their fellows. Only Booth himself, and the two overlookers who seemed to have been chipped from the same piece of stone as the master, knew the mill's secrets; but rumour, uglier than truth because it gives fancy greater licence, ran in and out about the country-side and folk who had been wont to shiver at the name of Guytrash and the Sorrowful Woman, shrank now from the least whisper of Booth's name.

Perhaps Royd was fanciful this morning, as he rode down the lane that led to Goit Mill and saw the high naked walls beneath him, for he told himself that the place had grown to the likeness of its master, and that its every window showed an eye of greed and lust and cruelty.

"Fool, fool!" he muttered. "What is it to you, Stephen Royd? You have to work—and," he finished, with a quick, passionate oath, "you shall not turn evangelist at the end of twenty years."

His heat, his use of an oath which came queerly from one who had always kept his passions well in hand, showed how keenly, underneath all personal trouble, beneath all his own private need of work for forgetfulness' sake, Royd was feeling the sorrows of the little world about him. If he began to fight shy of barter with such as Ephraim Booth, he would lessen

his trade by three-quarters at the least; the thought was folly, madness—yet it was mastering him.

At the bend of the lane, just where the thorn-bushes and the hollies intertwined, he came suddenly on Bancroft of the Heights, who was riding upward from the direction of the mill. Royd's brows went up in sheer surprise; for the lane had no other outlet than the mill on that side, and he could not guess what this spruce ne'er-do-weel could want among the wool-packs and the spinning-frames. Meetings between them were growing more and more uncomfortable. Bancroft, on his side, could not conceal the sense of triumph which with him meant insolence; while Royd was in a measure tongue-tied by regard for Barbara, and by fear lest he should give way to sudden heat and let Bancroft know just how far he was indebted to his rival. This morning the encounter, as it chanced, was more awkward than usual; for they met where the lane was narrowest, and Royd's horse began to spread its feet about as he tried to get it quickly past.

"Good-day to you, Mr. Royd," said Bancroft airily, as perforce he drew his horse close in to the right hand of the way, while he watched Royd regain the mastery of his beast.

"Good-day, Mr. Bancroft. My horse has caused you some inconvenience, I fear," answered Royd coldly.

"Don't name it! We were born to cause each other inconvenience, so it seems."

Royd was struck by the other's reckless air, more than by his open reference to a rivalry which should have been forgotten; he glanced more closely at him,

and saw that his face was flushed and his hands unsteady on the reins. A cold sense of sickness came over Stephen Royd; he was thinking no longer of himself, of his own dislike to Bancroft, but of the little maid who had deserved a different fate. He would have passed on, but Bancroft drew across his path, by aid of what seemed a chance movement of his bridle.

"What am I doing on the road to Goit Mill, you'll wonder?" he went on, with an air of would-be cunning. "Well, the truth is, Mr. Royd, I'm setting up in trade myself—going to beggar you for the sheer frolic of the thing. That's why I've been to the mill—I went to haggle about a bale of wool with that old scoundrel Ephraim Booth."

Royd's temper, when it broke, was apt to give way completely. "You are lying to me, Mr. Bancroft," he said slowly. "If I had any interest in your movements I could understand it better; but I've none. Now, will you give me room to pass?"

Bancroft of the Heights gave a long glance at Royd. "By and by—when you've taken back that word, or paid for it," he said, with a certain boldness that was not his but the wine's that had flushed his cheek.

"I'll pay for it—yes," said Royd, half impatiently, half with the indulgence which an older man shows to a stripling. "What do you want, Mr. Bancroft? What sort of payment? And then perhaps when the debt is cancelled you will move aside, for I'm in haste to finish my business at the mill."

There was less assurance now in Bancroft's air.

"You called my honesty in question; will you take back the word?" he muttered.

"You ask too much of me. I only promised payment."

For a moment the other hesitated, and half-raised his crop; then, with a sudden movement of the reins, he backed his horse and left the way clear for his adversary. "I'm in liquor, sir, and should fight at disadvantage," he said, with a dignity altogether droll. "Perhaps another time—"

"Any time, Mr. Bancroft—but call on me out of business hours if it is equally convenient."

Royd shrugged his shoulders as he passed down the road. He had never seen Bancroft so deep in debt to the bottle, and he despised himself already for giving way to passion with one so little his own master. Then he thought once again of Barbara; and a line of pain, deep and clean-cut, came out above his brows. His pity for her was near to anguish; and it was selfless, as it could not have been before he learned the lesson taught, not by labour coupled with hope, but by the work which has renunciation for guide and sole companion. Barbara could never now be his, and it was strange how much his care for her, his power of caring for her, had been deepened by the knowledge.

He was at the mill-gate now, and with a sigh he brought his mind back to the price of yarn. A girl was standing in the mill-yard—a full-figured swarthy lass, with a freckled hand resting on either well-turned hip. Royd had seen her once or twice about the mill, and knew her for Booth's daughter. Indeed, the likeness of

the pair was obvious, though the father's cruelty had taken in the daughter another and a kindred road.

"Shall I find Mr. Booth?" asked Royd, half saluting her with his whip.

The girl looked up the road which Bancroft of the Heights had taken; and her colour deepened as she turned with a sort of subdued defiance in her face for which Royd could find no reason.

"He went to Marshcotes a good two hours ago," she answered.

"Is there no chance of seeing him, think you, if I wait?"

"Well, he doesn't often miss his victuals if he can help it, and dinner's all but cooked."

"I'll wait then," said Royd briefly.

"Would you like to step into the house?" the girl suggested, still with her eyes on the Ling Crag road, and still in the same grudging tone.

Royd shook his head; at a pinch he could bring himself to trade with Ephraim Booth, but enter his door he would not. Ling Crag born, the master-weaver had never lost, in mart or mill, that fine-edged sense of hospitality which with the moor-folk comes next to godliness.

"I prefer the open," he said, with blunt lack of courtesy.

The girl made no rejoinder, but crossed, with her free, reckless stride, to the open house-door and left Royd to wander at his pleasure among the litter of the yard. The breeze was sweet, and the sun's warmth kindly, on the moors and sloping fields; but no touch

of the summer's graciousness could penetrate the squalor of the factory-yard. The heaps of rubbish lying here and there, sent up a greasy stench; the nettles and the docks looked as ragged and forlorn as the rusted scraps of iron which they half concealed; and Royd, whose eye was keen for the little things that are sure tokens of the greater, felt all his old revulsion intensified.

He stood there idly, listening to the rattle of the spinning-frames and to the water sliding down its wooden sluice; and then he started, just as he had done long months ago when standing in this self-same yard. The cry of the children had sounded once again from behind the factory walls, and the master-weaver listened to it with new sensibilities—the sensibilities that trouble and renunciation had sharpened to a dangerous edge. It was so needless, all this cruelty, all this ugliness and grime. Trade prospered no better for it, but fared the worse; it was flat denial, not of humanity only, but of common-sense.

Little as he had liked trade, Stephen Royd had had his dreams. His own clean mill-yard, flanked by its strip of garden, was one outward sign of his ideal, just as his cleanly rule within-doors was; and he found himself, with a few others of like mind, among the jostling crowd of masters who stopped for nothing, who cared for nothing, so long as this day's money-making—and perhaps to-morrow's—was assured. It could not last; not the roots only, but the flower of their prosperity, were deep in offal, and their children

would one day have to pay a bitter price for the wealth which would only emphasise their moral beggary.

Ephraim Booth would have laughed his own rough mirthless laugh could he have known what thoughts were thronging in on Royd this morning—thoughts that were interrupted by the clanging of the factory-bell. It was the children's meal-time, and Royd watched two weary lines of them pass into and out of the mill-doors. The one line was freed from toil for fifteen minutes, lest hunger should be strained a shade too far; the other was going to the deserted spindles lest a moment of this God-sent day of money-making should be lost. Royd had seen them in the dimmer light of the factory; but he turned from them instinctively now that he saw the sunlight on their faces. Dwarfed, pinched, fevered, the two sad lines went by each other; their glances did not meet; their only greeting was a chance stumble now and then the one against the other. Behind each line an overlooker walked, with his lithe thong swinging in the sunlight. Up above, on the breezy hillside, men were stooping to the garnered sheaves, and laughing as they felt the well-earned sweat run down them; below, this other rustic scene—and one that was no less a part of every-day routine—was being played through.

Sick at heart as he was, Royd held his ground and watched. He saw the out-coming line of children pass in by the low doors of the hovels where they ate, and slept; a little time sufficed them to swallow, with famished haste, such food as was provided; and then they

came out again, and stood about in listless groups. Not one of them made any attempt to play; the ears of all were turned toward the great bell that would by and by be summoning them to toil. Still watching, Royd saw that two or three of them—children whose faces held still a fragment of intelligence—were sliding off toward the row of pigsties that lined one wall of the yard. He followed them, and the listless groups shrank feebly from him, with the instinct of wild animals, as he pushed his way between their ranks. As he neared the railings of the sties, he saw the adventurous three climb over, and mingle with the pigs, and fight with them for the meal-balls that had just been thrown to them. For Ephraim Booth was careful of his pigs, and fed them well, knowing that what he spent would come back to him again with increase.

Like one in a nightmare, Royd stood and watched the grim contest of the human with the brute. He had heard much of this mill-life; he had thought to have plumbed in fancy its lowest depths; but what he saw here was unbelievable, if one had told him of it—was scarcely credible even now as it passed before his eyes.

The pigs were well-used to the invasion, so it seemed; they had fifty ruses for securing their food, and the children tried to match their guile with greater guile. The overlooker—inevitable as the air they breathed—stepped in to shorten the impromptu meal. The lash came down, and the children scurried fast as they could climb across the fence; and the pigs were assured once more of a full meal.

Stephen Royd turned then—the bell was already

clanging out its summons—and untethered his horse from the gate and got to saddle. Ephraim Booth came down the lane at the same moment, on his way from Marshcotes, and he stopped on seeing Royd.

"Well, an' what's fresh wi' ye, Maister Royd?" he said. "Come to do a bit o' trade, like? If it's yarn ye're i' search of ye mud as weel go back, for I've selled ivery pund this morn."

Royd stayed awhile looking with a kind of curiosity at the master of Goit Mill. "I've seen strange sights in there," he said, pointing backward to the yard—"sights that have made me swear never to pass a penny-piece with you again."

"Oh, that's it, is it?" cried Booth, leaning against the gate-post and surveying Royd in turn with interest. "Well, ye're a littlish man, as brass goes; I could chuck all th' trade ye could bring me, an' a dozen like ye, into th' goit yonder, an' niver miss it. Ye're ower fine i' t' breed, Royd—a bit soft—as us o' th' new style reckon ye. Hes a child dropped a tear or two, or what, that ye're all i' a fine muck-sweat o' pity?"

"It isn't much I ask, after all," said Royd, in the same matter-of-fact tone; "I should like to see you get more work out of your spinners, at less cost to them; and I should like to see them fed as liberally as the pigs you're fattening over yonder."

Ephraim Booth gasped. His astonishment was not feigned at all, but sincere as his greed, sincere as his cruelty.

"Feed 'em as I feed th' pigs?" he echoed. "Ye

get dafter ivery year, Royd o' Hazel Miln. Do I work for brass, or for a bit o' laking? I doan't want to fatten th' childer, do I? I shall get no sides o' bacon fro' them. An' a soft chap I should be to put a farthing's weight more into their bellies nor what they'll give out again i' wark."

For the second time that morning Royd's temper snapped. "God help you," was all he said, as he touched his horse's flanks, afraid of the length to which his tongue might carry him if he allowed it licence.

Yet as he rode home—rode through the quiet of the breezy uplands—he realised the idleness of meeting such as Ephraim Booth with anger or persuasion. The man was as God had made him, and as the man had helped to make himself—the first rough mould of character still rougher. He was ridden by money as by a devil, the lust of money slept with him and waked with him, possessed him to the exclusion of all else. Not lust for the things that money would buy, not ambition for the high places in the world which he might gain by its assistance—but lust of money for money's own brute sake. As a character, he was complete within his own narrow limits; unstirred by pity, love, or hate, he followed his self-chosen road and never faltered by the way.

And then Royd thought of his own love of land—the love that had kept his life-work wholesome. And he acknowledged, with a queer humility, that he, too, might have grown to be something of an Ephraim Booth had there been no long low house upon the hill to mark his road. Well, he had dreamed of throwing up

this wool-trade altogether, and if he could not leave it as he had wished—master of the Heights and slave of Barbara—he had the easier task in abandoning his mill. What did it matter now whether he made money or not? His own needs were slight enough, and he would at least be free of this disastrous trade which ground little children under its unheeding wheels. Again he forgot his need of work; again he thought, with longing and relief, of a farmstead, a few score acres of hard land, and a life beneath God's sky.

Yet he was to change what was now a keen desire with him; he was to put his hand to the plough once again, and to drive a straight furrow—for another's sake, as Parson Horrocks had foretold. Nor was he to do it by aid of money earned at Goit Mill, for a reason which Ephraim Booth could well have told him had he been so minded.

CHAPTER XVII

LOVE-LIGHT IN THE DAWN

BARBARA could not rest to-night; she felt closed in by the four walls of Wynyates, and liberty, it seemed—liberty of mind and of body—could only be found where the free wind blew across the moor. The weeks had passed since she plighted troth to Bancroft; but the grief of it was keen as ever. It might be four of the morning; across the blackness of the window-panes faint lights of grey were stealing, and the branches of the fir without threw feeble shadows on the glass. A solitary thrush was singing in the dawn from the pear-tree on the wall, and rooks were fretting in the elms.

She slipped to the floor and plunged her face into the ewer; then, donning frock and mantle, she went softly down the stair, undid the bolts of the main door and went out into the gathering day. She stopped a moment at the low wall, and reached over for a sprig of London pride, and listened to the throstle whose speckled breast showed clear against the gloomy branches of the fir. He sang as birds do sing in the early morning—as though his throat were not tuned yet to its true note, yet with a wealth of joy, a gay,

light-hearted rhapsody that told of hope. The world of moor and pasture was quiet—quiet with an intensity of stillness that almost weighed on one. The wind was cool, with promise of good warmth, and dew lay light as thistle-down upon the grey house-roof and on the grass-grown bridle-track.

Still and grey the sky was yet, as Barbara went through the field gate and up toward the moor; but over all its face a vague light twinkled—twinkled and was gone, and came again; and ever the fluttering bands of light grew wider, and the morning star that watched above Lostwithens grew dimmer and more wan, and the throstles sang by threes now, where lately they had left the dawn-song to one lorn minstrel. Up and farther up went little Barbara, with the wind making playful snatches at her cloak—up until the rolling midnight of the hills stretched out and out before her. Slowly their black chines lighted to the dawn—fitfully, as the sky itself had done—and slowly the purple crept into the surly pools of night that filled their basins. It was the purple, deep, velvety and mystical, which comes only at break of dawn or fall of gloaming, and the sight of it brought a strange awe, and a stranger peace, to Barbara's troubled face. For self was lost here, and the fret of human circumstance dwindled to its true significance. What mattered it that a maid here or a man there had lost the birthright of their happiness? Such things had been, and maid and man had lived their little span, and peat lay over them and all their sorrows; but the hills, and the moving pageant of rose-lights and purples, and the stark,

dawn-lit waste of ling—these were from of old, and a whole life's tragedy was less than one miracle of sun-birth such as this.

Barbara stood there for long, her eyes upon the hills; and, as she watched, the grey patches of the sky grew pink as the petals of a dog-rose—there was a sudden hush, a sense as if the earth were gathering up her thews for one vast effort—and the sun came up in glory and in flame from his far journey over-seas. The moor turned from sleep, and opened countless eyes—of dew-frost, flower, and water—to welcome the bridegroom of her choice; and fold by fold the hill-mists lifted, as if the new-awakened land were throwing off the fleecy coverings of night.

Still Barbara watched—a straight, slight figure outlined clear against the sky—watched while strange lights, of tints and softness unbelievable, flickered and pulsed above the dark edge of the heath. Now a wave of crimson swept upward from the east, swift and vivid and triumphant; a wave of purple followed, and again withdrew; the day's spendthrift hour was come, and Barbara's eyes—wide-open as they ranged the sky, and big with a sense of mystery—could find no rest from the shifting lights—dove-grey, purple-grey, light green and brown and sepia—that overspread the heavens. Beneath it all the moor stretched wide and knew no borderland. It was in such hours that Barbara thrilled with that sense of the worthiness of life which in itself is prayer; all things were possible, all things were worthy—and faith was justified in the strong God who sets us here to come, through love and soul-travail and

sorrow of the flesh, to an understanding of the deep purpose of the world.

"It is so true—so true, and free, and godlike," she murmured breathlessly.

She turned to go at last, and turned again for a last backward look; and as she looked toward the northern line of hills, she saw a wide-shouldered figure come swinging over the hill-crest not half a mile away. Surprise was her first thought—surprise and a wish to hide herself from Stephen Royd; but that passed quickly. The sense was strong on her that all this had happened before, in some forgotten fairy-land of dawn and heather-dew; Stephen was here by right; she would wait for him, and let his eyes seek hers, and be content. To him, too, the meeting seemed forefated, and when they met on the crest of the next dingle, he just took both her hands in his, frankly and masterfully. The witchery of dawn and wind was on them, and Barbara felt as if, spirits loosed from the prison-house, they had come to revel where the sky was big above the big, free waste. She was free of her troth to Bancroft of the Heights—free for the nonce in fancy—and she and Stephen, here upon the dawn-lit moor, were friend and friend together. The same thought was in the minds of both, for he smiled with the old frankness, and, "Babs," he said, "I've found my little playmate."

She did not answer for awhile, but plucked a handful of rushes and pulled them one by one to pieces. Then, "Take me away, Stephen," she cried, stirred by the old rebellious blood; "take me away for one whole day, and let me feel the sunlight."

Not lightly had Barbara let the weeks of trouble—trouble the bitterer for its loneliness—come to a head in that one passionate plea for sunlight. She was a child again, out on the open moor with her old comrade, and Royd's strength—her own need of strength to rest against—overmastered for the moment her woman's instinct of reticence. And she touched a chord in Royd that had lain idle longer than was good for him; she made herself in very fact a child again to him—the one child who could claim his sympathy. To be sure, he remembered the day's business that was waiting for him, for second nature does not yield without a protest; but that slipped off from him, as he sought her eyes again, and laughed light-heartedly.

"We'll go to Wyecollar," he cried,—"Bab's we'll go to Wyecollar, and breakfast there, and go over all the haunts of bad old Simon Cunliffe, your ancestor."

"Indeed, he was not bad," she retorted; "he was a very gallant gentleman, Stephen, and—"

"And a kind husband," he added teasingly. "Did he not ride up the stairs into his wife's room, with all the babel of the hunt in front of him? And did he not chide her when she screamed in protest? Answer me that, Barbara."

"His wife, I think, was too faint-hearted; and I'm very fond of old Squire Cunliffe, Stephen. Can we really go to Wyecollar, think you?"

"Not a doubt of it. There's a peewit yonder by the tarn and a moor-sheep cropping on the slope—will they say us nay, Babs? And if not they, then who will?"

"But father? He will miss me at the breakfast-

table," she said, looking as she had looked long since, when anxious for an escapade and asking Royd to find excuse for her.

"Well, then, we cannot have a day together—but go to Wyecollar we will, and I'll bring you home by breakfast-time. We're early birds, you and I, and we've half a day before the breakfast-hour. Come, child," he added, as she hesitated now, "it is over late in life to begin crossing any of my whims."

She laughed a little, with quiet content, and went beside him up the slope, while the sun changed from red to crocus-gold, and the dew receded step by glittering step at the sun's touch, and yellow asphodel laughed up at them from the fringe of many a bogland patch.

"How did you come to be up here?" asked Barbara by and by. "It is very well for me, Stephen, who have no long day of work before me."

"Yet it was just that which took me wandering all the night—for I have to make my mind up, and act on it before the day is out. No, not one question, Babs, not one! We'll make the most of this good fortune."

Long since they had learned the sympathetic speech of silence, these two whose friendship had been interrupted for so long; and not a word was spoken till they came in sight of Bouldsworth Hill, with its round crown curved against the red and saffron of the sky. Twice their eyes had met—once when they disturbed a cock-grouse who was following a well-worn feeding-trail, and again when they crossed a patch of bracken just unfurled and smelt the subtlest and the sweetest fragrance that the heath has to give; and scent of the

greening bracken and cry of the startled grouse awakened deeper memories in both than they could put to words.

"Do you know your way, Stephen?" she asked at last, with a glance of mischief. "You have lived so long in mills, and there is never a track, you know, from here to Wyecollar."

He looked at Bouldsworth Hill and laughed. "Due west by the sun from round old Bouldsworth yonder," he said. "Do you think I have forgotten all the ways of freedom, Babs?"

"We both have," she cried, and repented the sorrowful tone which matched the day so ill. "Stephen," she went on quickly, lest he should add anything to this, her second confession, "Stephen, you will not come out at Wyecollar Dene; I know you will not; it is difficult even when one has followed the moor-track only yesterday."

"And we? It must be two whole years since we last found the way together. Still, I have faith, Babs."

"And I have none, for I'm in a master-weaver's hands—not in Stephen's, who used to know each hillock and each wrinkle of the moor."

Another silence, broken by Barbara as the hills of Lancashire stepped boldly into view. Pendle, round as Bouldsworth and thrice as big, with the steep bluff slope that marked him, stood up above the swart line of his brethren, and in between a desolate stretch of moor swept skyward over peat, and bog, and lonely channels of streams that had no music. With the sun shadows for guides across the trackless moor, they still

kept forward, until at last they struck a rutty highway.

"What did I tell you, Babs? Yonder's the dene and we're not fifty yards beyond our reckoning," cried Stephen.

"I wronged you—and you're not the master-weaver any longer," she added, with a laughing glance.

They left the road almost as soon as they had found it, and dropped down into the hollow until the open moor lay spread before them. A true dene, this bonnie Wyecollar—narrow, moor-rimmed, yet with a wealth of softness in it the greater for the contrast with the bleak uplands that shut it in.

The charm it had had of old for them, it had to-day—the strange and never-varying charm that spelt *Wyecollar*. The path beside the stream was spanned by as many bridges almost as there were houses in the hamlet. Here was a solid length of stone, so long it seemed at first sight it must be a trunk of beech or ash; then came a dainty bridge with a double arch, with wall-flowers growing in every cranny that could harbour soil; after that a one arched bridge, and so all down the streamway till the road ran free of houses out to Lanshaw Brigg.

Never to her life's end did Barbara forget that day. The sweetness of the wind, with gorse and heather, ling and peat, adding each its perfume to that nameless odour of the summer which filled the sheltered dene—the cool sky overhead—the remembered houses and unforgotten nooks of this lone corner of the moors—all played the one sweet tune for her. It was childhood

back again, and yet she was a woman to know and understand the joy of it. They had no thought of what was passed, of what was to come; the sunlit present only beckoned them. A mistal-door stood open as they went by, and Barbara peeped in to smell the well-loved reek, to see the stalls—empty now, for the kine were at summer pasturage—to renew acquaintance with the stream that rippled over the stone floor.

"All as it was, Stephen," she cried; "never a trace of change, is there, in sleepy Wyecollar?"

"I wonder if the breakfasts are the same," said Royd. "Shall we go see, Babette?"

They went back along the stream-side then, and in at the stone porch of a farmstead on their right; old friends of both were breakfasting within, and they sat down as naturally as if they had been here but yesterday together. And still the same mood held them—held them until they were out into the road again and nearing the old Hall, which was steeped to its roof-stones with memories of roysterers dead and gone.

The main gate and the main door, with its two holly trees over-topping the house-gables, stood open, and they passed into the great dining-hall. A hall for wassail and for feast, with its twelve windows looking toward the south, its height and length and breadth. The dogs still stood within the fireplace, under the great chimney and fronting the stone seat where twenty folk could foregather of a winter's even, and listen to the trumpet of the wind high up among the moors, and pass the bowl with ever-gaining speed. The little oven on the right hand of the hearth—the door to the inner

room with the date of 1596 upon it—all was familiar to Barbara as if she, a Cunliffe, had lived with the Cunliffes of the old time and had sat at meat with them.

"Come to the stairway, Stephen," she cried. "We must see where old Squire Simon left his traces long ago."

Yes, there were the clear hoof-prints on the stone steps up which old Simon Cunliffe had ridden in the wake of fox and hounds—on the second step, and on the topmost step but one.

"What is the tale again, Barbara?" asked Royd, as he eyed the hoof-prints.

"Nay, it is old to you by this time."

"So old as to be all but forgotten."

"Well, he went a-hunting once on a day—it was in Charles the Second's time, we're told—and the fox led them a five-mile chase across the moors until he came to Wyecollar Dene. He crossed the stream between the straight bridge and the double-arched, and would have turned down the village; but the hounds headed him, and he ran straight as a die through the open main door of the hall, and up the stair here; the hounds followed, and after them the old Squire spurred his horse right up the stair, and into his wife's room, where she had been busy with her tiring-maid until the entry of the fox disturbed them. The wife screamed aloud in terror—for the hound's teeth were already in the fox, and the music of the hunt was deafening—and Simon Cunliffe swore a great oath, and cursed her chicken-heartedness, and raised his hunting-crop as if to strike her. That and the fright together killed her, so they

say, and all in haste the Squire drove out the hounds, lest they should turn upon his fallen lady."

"A good tale, Babs—it has the old stuff in it," cried Royd.

"He was right to chide her—and he did not touch her with the whip," said Barbara, with an eager sparkle in her eyes. "Had I been she, Stephen, I should have clapped my hands to see the brave sport through."

"You would," he answered slowly, his eyes upon her face. "Yes, you're a Cunliffe to your finger-tips. So you think it shame, Babs, that old Simon Cunliffe should be condemned to ride through all the centuries for his misdoing?"

She glanced behind; broad daylight as it was, she had expected to see the Squire, and his spectral hounds, and the ghost of a hard-driven fox, come pelting up the stair on dumb and hurried feet.

"It is no use to smile, Stephen," she murmured. "He rides, and he will ride so long as there's a Cunliffe on the moorside.—Hark, do you hear? Do you hear?"

Clear up the dene there came an eerie note, like the blare of a hunting-horn, fast-travelling in the wake of a gusty breeze. Barbara heard it, and so did Royd, and they stood looking at each other until long after the sound had gone dying down the valley.

Barbara, to change the current of her thoughts, pointed to the stone shields on either side the hearth which carried the arms of the Cunliffes and their life-story. A hare in full flight, followed by the hounds in full cry, with a huntsman galloping after. "That,

too, is like the Cunliffes, through and through. You remember the last of the Wyecollar Cunliffes, Stephen? He was the sturdiest of them all, I think, and the keenest to follow wherever the hounds led."

"He was like my father," said Royd quietly. It was in some ways the sincerest praise that he could give any man.

"And how we have altered, all of us," she murmured, leaning against the side of the hearth-place and looking gravely at him. "My father busy with his chemicals—you with your trade. Stephen, are we falling on worse days?"

"They tell us not," he answered moodily. "They say we are to learn more than ever our fathers dreamed of."

"*They say!* Ah, yes—but they say untrue and foolish things oftener than they say wise ones."

A sudden need came to him to unburden himself to this woman who so short a while ago had been a child, and full in sympathy with him. His need of companionship made comradeship a doubly precious thing once he had found it. He dropped into a seat beside her in the ingle-nook; and here, where the lusty forebears of her race had passed the wine-song or the hunting-tale, he told her some of the iniquities of modern trade—told them, with the free wind fluting downward from the moor, and the throstles singing, and the starlings chirping in the eaves. It was a strange contrast, and Royd's tale was one that might well have caused the old, free-riding Cunliffes to smile in derision at the newer race. They had been rough in their way, but it was a bluff,

healthy, out-of-doors way, that had no kinship with the roughnesses of trade. Barbara's face was saddened as they went out by the main door, and across the court-yard, and into the road beside the stream. "Old days are best," she said, stooping to pluck a double daisy from beside the path. "I wish we were back, Stephen, you and I, among the folk who drank there and were merry."

"We should find them—what we find the Ling Crag and the Wyecollar folk of to-day. They would love, and they would hate—they'd be honest and thievish, comely and ill-featured—some would marry and repent, others would—"

"Fie, sir! You are in no fit humour for Wyecollar. Are you a little sick at heart, Stephen?" she added, with a quick change of voice.

He laughed. "Sick at heart? Did we not say we were making holiday?"

"True; but the children tire sometimes amid their merrymaking."

"Babette," he said, stooping to look into her face, "Babette, we shall be growing over-serious unless we have a care—and Squire Cunliffe will be awaiting you at breakfast."

"At Wynyates?" she laughed. "Stephen, we've come far, haven't we? and even at that we have breakfasted two hours or so before our friends." Again she turned for a last look at Wyecollar, and again the shadow crossed her face; they were ill-fated, all the Cunliffes, and she not less than any of them.

"Oh, come away, Stephen!" she murmured, turning

to climb the lane, winding and grass-grown, which once had been a trim-kept carriage-way.

That old thorn-bordered lane with the wild-rose faces peeping out at her from either bank! It roused the tenderest memories of all in Barbara. How often she had pictured men and maidens riding homeward from the hunt down this same lane; had listened, in fancy, to their talk, and had woven about them many a strange romance of other days. There were late violets blooming in the deep grass-bank on either hand of the road; once she had thought them eyes of the tender past, still watching the more sordid issues of the present; she thought so still, even while she laughed at herself for harbouring such childish fancies. Rough underfoot, neglected, a world away from the haunts of men, was this old-time carriage-way of the Cunliffes; only the ghosts of the past had right-of-way here now, and Barbara told herself that she and Stephen were sadly out of place—that surely they should have ruffs and farthingales, or Stuart bravery, to flaunt in the pink faces of the hedge-roses. Yet Barbara's heart, and Barbara's flower-like face, and Barbara's proud and lissom carriage, were full in keeping with the days of old; and Stephen, stealing a glance at her, wondered if any ancestress of hers had walked this way who would not have envied Barbara her charm.

The road turned sharply, and above them showed the old gateway, with its rounded balls still topping the square uprights; and across the line of the gateway struck the yellow road that led from Yorkshire into Lancashire. A train of pack-horses was passing at the

moment, with wool-sacks slung across their wooden saddles.

"The voice of to-day again," murmured Barbara, pointing to the horses.

Royd turned his back deliberately. There was only the curve of the road below him—that, and the reddening thorns, and the smell of lusty summer. In front might be the unrest of to-day, the barter and the strife —but below here all was peace.

"Babs," he said, with sudden heat, "I'm weary of it all."

Instinctively she laid a hand upon his arm. "Yet you have done so well, Stephen," she said.

"Well? What does it mean, this doing well? I'm rich, as men go. I have gold, little Barbara—and after that, what? Where will the human touch come in?" His voice grew husky on the sudden, "Babs, what use is all my money to me?" he repeated, with passionate intensity.

She raised her eyes to his, and met them with one long, startled glance; and they understood what never in this world would they forget. He hesitated, striving with his worse self, then moved slowly up the slope beside her in silence—yet not in the friendly, all-sufficing silence that had held them as they crossed the moor.

They passed between the grey old gate-stones, with their memories of old revelries, old courtesies, old tragedies and comedies. They went, still in the same silence, up the sandy road and on past the Herders Tavern, where Lavrock, too, with his old-fashioned

notions of ease and open-handedness upon the part of travellers, had striven unsuccessfully against the newer order.

"And you are going to marry Bancroft of the Heights," said Royd slowly.

"Yes, I am going to marry Mr. Bancroft," she said, half fearfully, half firmly.

The crucial moment of Royd's life had come, had he but known it. Temptation was strong on him to play the master here, as he had played the master throughout life—to tell her that he, not Bancroft, was her mate. For a moment the matter hung doubtful in the balance; and Barbara, knowing it, prayed fiercely that Stephen would come through the trial, lest ever afterwards he should be a little less than Stephen to her.

"The wind blows colder than it did," he said at last, and laughed in a dry, empty fashion that startled his companion.

He had triumphed, and she was glad of it; but duty, for all that, was a colder thing just now to Barbara than any breeze that blew athwart old Wyecollar.

"Take me home again, Stephen," she murmured. "I am tired, I think, and the sunshine only hurts me now I've found it."

They walked in silence round the bend of Dangerous Corner, and down the hill, and up the grass-grown bridle-way that climbed to the grey house of Wynyates. Barbara stopped then, and looked for a moment into Royd's face as she said farewell.

"How the wind moaned at Wyecollar," she murmured,—"Stephen, how it moaned!"

"Let the wind blow if it lists," he muttered, while he picked his way down the stoney lane beside the stream. "It can bring no further lucklessness to me at anyrate."

His father's temper was showing itself again; if much was gone, all was gone, and he threw a reckless challenge out to fate to do its worst. But for this mood in the father, the grass might well have been growing now over a grave more honoured, and the Heights have known no change of master; yet Stephen did not stay to think of this as he strode down the Dene not heeding the sunlight on the slope.

He scarce understood what ailed him, nor guessed that knowledge of what might have been—the knowledge that he had gleaned that day—was making him restless beyond bearing.

To his surprise he saw Booth of Goit Mill waiting for him at his door.

"Are ye thrang?" said Booth, with a curt nod.

"Not if you have come on business," answered the other, with equal curtness.

"Then I'll step forrard, like, an' sit me down, for what I've come to say will bide some telling."

Royd made way for him. "It is an early hour for a visit," he said, motioning him into the little living-room. "Can I offer you anything?"

"Well, as you put it that way, I'll hev a sup o' wine. I war niver one to pass owt by, drink, or victuals, or brass, when it war offered. What say ye, Maister Royd?"

Royd smiled in his grim fashion. "It depends upon the giver, Mr. Booth."

"Ay, there ye go! What did I say when first I heard ye'd ta'en Hazel Miln? Stephen Royd belangs t' quality, I said, an' he'll hev notions, I said, an' he'll niver learn to lap up all that's offered, same as a cat 'ull lap up cream. That's what I said, an' it's as true to-day as it war twenty years ago."

"Possibly. You like the wine? Then let me fill you another measure."

"Now then," said Booth, soon as his glass had been replenished—"straight to t' point is better nor guineas, as t' saying is, an' I've come to ye wi' a bit of a difficulty, Maister Royd."

"Indeed?"

"Ay, I'm feeling t' pinch of all these strikes an' failures, an' that's truth. Mebbe we hevn't been worse friends because we've fratched a bit, like, now an' again? Mebbe we'll live an' lat live, ye an' me, an' shake hands ower owd times?"

"We have been neither friendly nor unfriendly, Mr. Booth; if there is anything in the strict way of business—"

"Weel, it's business an' it isn't, just as ye choose to look at it. I'm hard pressed, an' I've some calls to meet i' a week's time; if I can tide over that, I shall be on my legs again."

"I am sorry, of course, to hear it—but how can I assist you?" said Royd, seeing that his guest was waiting for him to speak.

"By lending me, say five thousand punds; that's how ye can help me."

Royd laughed, as he got to his feet and stood against the mantel. "You have come to an empty nest, on your own showing," he said. "I'm a poor man, Mr. Booth, as you have often told me."

"I war mista'en, as I happened to learn a while back. Ye're warm, warm, they tell me, since ye kept your men at work while other maisters played."

"They say many things in Ling Crag, and I would not credit gossip, if I were you. No, Mr. Booth; we are agreed that I am poor."

"That means ye willun't lend?"

"It means exactly what I say, and what you have said times without number. Look at the size of this little mill of mine; do you think it worth a thousand pounds all told?"

Booth in his turn got to his feet and began to pace restlessly up and down the floor. "Ye're shrewd —shrewder nor I thowt ye," he growled. "Nay, don't stand there, an' look me up an' down, an' reckon it's all play-word, this. I mun hev t' brass, one way or another, an' that's plain truth."

"You must borrow from a richer man, I fear."

"Rich men are getting scarce, an' they're varry shy o' lending nowadays. We'll put it another way, then. I'm in your debt to th' tune o' three thousand punds or theerabouts."

"Three thousand and fifty, to be exact. Well, Mr. Booth?"

"Well, if I can't tide ower this pass, I may pay five

shillings i' th' pund—mebbe less. If I can tide ower, your brass 'ull be as safe as rick."

"I must take my chance, Mr. Booth," said Royd; "what money I have is all locked up, and in any case I do not care to lend."

Booth knew that tone of his host's, it was decisive, and denied all further argument. "Well, ye knaw best, though I'm thinking ye mak a big mistake. There's nobody likes to fail, is there, Maister Royd?"

Much as he knew of the other's methods, Stephen was half sorry for him now. He had not thought that the rough cruel face could grow almost wistful; yet wistful it was, for Booth was looking forward and seeing his money the one thing on earth he loved, slip from his hands just when he had thought it sure—and all for want of a poor few thousand pounds.

"I am sorry," he repeated—"very sorry, Mr. Booth."

"An' so will young Bancroft be, I reckon," said Booth, with a surly gleam of humour. "He found my lass more to his liking nor Squire Cunliffe's proud little wench—an' she war so set on his looks, an' his seat on horseback, an' his cantrips, that nowt would serve but she mun hev him."

"Her choice was fortunate," said Royd drily.

"Well, I'd no mind to interfere wi' that. Wool's my business, not wenches; an' if Bancroft wanted to wed her, I war willing to do summat handsome for them i' t' way o' brass. Brass should mate wi' brass, I allus did say, an' Bancroft is as warm as any man i' th' moorside, I reckon."

"Possibly. You will take another glass of wine, Mr. Booth, before you leave?"

"Ay, to drink ill-luck out, though I'd liefer hev drunk gooid luck in, an' that's a fact. There's no chance, ye think, that ye'll change your mind in a while?"

Royd shook his head as he ushered his guest out into the millyard. "I will not press for the money you owe me, if you can borrow the remainder," he said.

Booth turned to give him an inquiring glance. "Stephen Royd was harder when I saw him last," he muttered.

"He was—and since then he has known ill-luck, just as his neighbours have. Good morning to you."

The master weaver stood there long after the sound of footsteps had died down the dene. Troubles were thickening about him still, it seemed; Booth's was but one of many failures, a succession of such debts might beggar Royd within the month.

"There's still the mortgage on the Heights; I might raise money upon that," he murmured.

Yet his glance went up toward the valley-top from which he had watched, night after night, this house of his desire; and he told himself that he would never, come what might, imperil his chance of owning it one day. He had secured the mortgage after long waiting, and if he could not yet, for Barbara's sake, make use of his advantage, his opportunity might come when least he looked for it. For Barbara, after all, might not marry the present master of the Heights, remote as

seemed the hope—and in that case he would be free to press his advantage to the full.

"It would be like cutting off a hand to give up the mortgage now; better be beggared outright," he broke off, turning moodily indoors again. "How the wind snarls! It was idle to defy it."

CHAPTER XVIII

THE SOUTH WIND BLOWS

IT was the hour of milking kine. The shadows lengthened from the moor, and the throstles sang of a gloaming soon to fall. Down the steep fields the cattle came, with udders swaying from the right hand to the left, and in their faces that look of trustfulness in men to ease their burden that gives all cattle a kinship and a friendship with ourselves.

"Milking-time, Tabitha?" said Tim o' Tab's, coming round the corner of the farmstead.

"Ay, an' I've to milk the six o' them," answered Tabitha, shifting the milking-stool from the right arm to the left. "Wilt help me, Tim?"

"I should think it likely, lass. By th' Heart, yond dappled heifer carries full bags. She's a new un, an' all. What did thy father gi'e for her, dost call to mind?"

"Nay, I knawn't. Ten pund or theerabouts."

"Well, she's cheap at that, for I niver saw her like for snodness. Ye needn't tell your father so, mind ye, or he'll think hisseln a prime man at a bargain, an' I should be fashed to hev him think what warn't no way true."

"Father says just th' same o' thee, Tim," she

laughed, with a glance that did much to ruin Tim's discretion.

"What, says I'm no hand at a bargain?" echoed the other. "Why, I niver remember a time, when I warn't awther swopping or selling. I began i' th' cradle, I've a fancy."

Again Tabitha laughed. "I' th' cradle?" she murmured. "Tha'd be a fearful queer un to look at i' long clothes."

"I doan't recall," said Tim o' Tab's gravely; "but my mother allus said I war th' grandest babby to be fund i' all th' moorside—an' she should knaw, I reckon. It war i' th' up-growing 'at I fell off—grew to stalk, as th' saying is."

The dappled heifer lifted her patient head, and lowed in protest as she pushed her muzzle into Tabitha's face.

"Th' poor beast is right, Tim," cried the lass, as she set down the milking-stool and pulled her pail forward. "It's sin an' shame to stand gossiping here when all th' while there's six poor cows biding to be loosened o' their milk. Art noan bahn to help me?"

"I am that," said Tim, but did not shift from his easy lolling against the bridge; and his eyes were fixed, not on the cows, but upon Tabitha's firm, rounded arms and Tabitha's wind-sweetened cheeks.

"Go into th' house, then; tha'll find a stool an' a bucket just behind th' door," she went on briskly, with only a touch of frolic in her eyes to tell that she was conscious of the other's glance.

Tim got slowly up, and in the few yards that lay between him and the house he found time to tell himself

that all his fine resolves were weakening. It was easy, somehow, with only the silence of the moors about him, and only remembrance of Tabitha for company, to vow that he would be loyal to Squire Cunliffe's secret, easy to mistrust a woman's tongue-stillness; but such scruples wore a different air just now.

He came back in a moment, set down his stool and pail beside a second cow, as soberly as Tabitha had done, and began to press the teeming udders with fingers that were nimble at the job. For awhile they sat there, side by side, each apparently absorbed in the present labour, each wondering why the other was so slow of speech. And the wonder of a first love ripening to fruition stole over Tim o' Tab's. The warm steam of the milk, the rich, sweet savour of the cattle's breath, the sunlit evening peace and the falling breeze that had a scent of hay in it—could any man, whose backward days were all bound up in such-like scents and sounds, hear any call but nature's at such an hour? Each man for his own hand, when women were in case, and the Squire's secret must be kept or lost according to the will of Tabitha.

"Tha looks likelier now nor tha did one Sabbath morn I call to mind," said Tabitha presently, watching the bubbles skim white across the surface of the pail.

A momentary confusion seized on Tim. "It's noan easy to look likely wi' your legs i' th' stocks, an' your head i' th' middle of an oven,—for it war hot enow to bake your bread for ye that morn,—Tabitha, lass;" he added, after a pause, "I'd liefer ye hedn't passed by that way."

"An' so hed I. It's ill wark being shamed o' them ye've liked."

Tim stopped his milking and looked across at her. He remembered how, shamed or no, she had stopped in the open street, in the face of curious glances, to talk with him. He seemed to realize, without even thinking it, what staunch comrades to a man these women could be, with all their whimsies and their crooked ways of reaching a straight goal; but more than all he realized that this lass, sitting on a three-legged stool and splashing milk into a pail, was sweeter to him than any other thing beneath the sun.

"I've been thinking lately, Tabitha," he said, resuming his labor as the white cow looked round at him with question and reproach.

"I wodn't, Tim, if I war ye," she said demurely. "It thins a man, does thinking, an' ye're ower spare already."

"That's as may be—but I war thinking how Tabitha Hirst could mend me, if she hed a mind. It's noan easy to keep free o' mischief—I'm fonder o' few things nor I am o' mischief—but if tha'd tell me once for all it grieved thee—why—"

Tabitha was silent, and Tim o' Tab's got up from his milking-stool and had an arm about her waist before she had done marvelling at his slowness. And then a gruff voice broke into their talk.

"What, tha'rt here again, tha lig-i-bed!" cried Tabitha's father, who had watched them all down the long path that led from Smithbank Farm. "I willun't hev thee on my doorstun, as I've telled thee. I live by

wark, an' Tabitha lives by wark, an' that should be enough to keep thee off."

In a twinkling Tim was seated at his stool again, milking as if his life depended on it, and it was a very serious face he raised to meet Jonathan Hirst's dour glance.

"Nay, I war nobbut helping Tabitha to milk," he said. "I fund her thrang, an' four hands are better nor two, so I war allus telled."

Jonathan Hirst looked down upon the culprits—on Tim, with his face of innocence—on his daughter, whose eyes were bent upon her work. And, spite of himself, he could not hold his laughter back.

"Tha'rt a wastrel an' a raffle-coppin, Tim; but tha carries it wi' sich a lad-like face that a body can't kick thee ower t' beck, though I've getten a rare mind to. Tabitha, get thee into th' house, lass, an' I'll finish thy milking for thee."

Tabitha stood over-much in awe of her father to disobey him, but the glance she gave to Tim o' Tab's as she went in at the house-door needed no words to help its meaning. Tim, too, was bustled off without great ceremony, but not until he had told himself in plain terms that his wooing, if interrupted once or twenty times, must now go forward; he could not get on any longer without Tabitha—that was a surety.

It was later in the same evening, accordingly, that he came down the benty pasture-fields, while a young moon smiled at him from over the shoulder of the moor. He did not loiter, as his habit was, to search the ground for signs of bird and beast, but made for the low-walled

strip of garden that lay between the farmstead and the sheltering hill. A rushlight burned in Tabitha's window, and Tim could see the movement of a hand to put it out soon as his whistle sounded like the crying of a peewit over the trim garden. He knew that she was coming then, and leaned his arms upon the wall, and let the sweetness of the summer's night steal over him. The late rain and present warmth had brought a score new scents to birth. The wet earth, the currant trees, the bushy plants of lavender and lads'-love, lassies'-love and thyme and rue, each added its own fragrance to the night; and there was good promise, from the hives where the bees slept over their day's labor, that some at least of all this summer sweetness was being stored up against the winter-time.

Tim had a tender heart behind his graceless front, and thoughts that were worthy of the night, and worthy of his manhood, thronged in on him as he watched the silver of the moonlight grow brighter on the bents. Nay, who knows what dreams will not come to a man at such an hour, when a maid stands on the threshold of his hopes and brings with her the breath of summer gardens? Gentle or simple, we are all one in this, and the south wind of tenderness blows equally upon the rough skin and the smooth.

He watched her come down between the gooseberry bushes, while the thorns caught slily at her gown in passing and counselled prudence. It did not seem that there was any need of words at all; he just reached out his hands across the wall, and drew her to him. He bruised the currant-bushes as he did so, and their

crushed leaves gave out an added fragrance to the night.

"We mun be wed, lass, or I'll die for lack of thee," he said at last.

He felt her strive against the pressure of his arms; she had been free for two-and-twenty years, and one last impulse of resistance had come to her. She tried to mock him, to use the glib tongue and the light laugh that never till to-night had failed her. And then she strove no longer; and instead of laughter there came the low sigh of surrender.

"I mun help thee to live, then lad," she said.

An owl, far up the dene, began to screech, but they did not hear him. The young moon paled and lost herself outright behind the gathering clouds; light rain began to follow in the wind's wake down Hazel Dene; but they did not heed.

Tabitha was sobbing now against Tim's coat, with its stains of fur and feather, of rain and farmyard work; and he, with his new sense of the fitness of the world all foiled, was wondering how to comfort her in a sorrow that could have no real existence. Men have tried as much aforetime, but not always with the success that Tim o' Tab's achieved to-night.

"Nay, lass, nay," he murmured. "What ails thee, then?"

She threw her head back on the sudden, and tried to read his face by the dim light. "Love comes light to some, an' goes as light," she said; "but it's not so wi' me. Tha's hed a man's way wi' women here an' there—nay, doan't deny it, lad."

"I'll noan deny it, Tabitha; I'd be shamed to," he said simply. "It takes a man hot when he least looks for't—an' lasses doan't allus help him, maybe, when th' spring is quick in 'em. An' I'll be fashed for it till I dee, for muck sticks, an' ye can no way help it, if once ye choose to walk through't."

"I doan't blame thee, Tim,"—she was still trying to read his face,—"I'm only feared for what's to come. Tim, will ye niver understand? I war born a woman —God help us all—an' I love thee, lad."

There was not Tabitha's love alone in this last confession, which was half a plea—there was the sorrow of giving, and the joy of giving, which the long line of her foremothers had known.

"Come thee back again," said Tim, as he leaped the low wall and put his arms close round her once again, with new-found mastery; "lig thy head on my shoulder, lass, an' I'll tell thee summat. Hev I iver shaped like a fly-by-night sin' I learned to look for thy comings an' thy goings? Hev I iver thowt owt but th' best on ye—an' o' myseln for loving thee?"

"I thowt not; I'd hev sworn it yesterday—but I've grown feared, Tim, an' all sin' I gave myseln to thee just now."

"Feared? Theer's no fear, lass, save 'at we niver come to wedlock, me an' thee."

A long silence; and then she leaned close to him. "I trust thee, lad," she said.

Tim o' Tab's had loved the benty pasture-fields with the moonlight glinting on the cropping hares. He had loved the freedom of his days, and the life which,

like the wind, blew whither it listed. But the sweetness of this moment, and the savour of it, he tasted for the first time.

They were roused by the sound of a footfall striking on a stone that lay among the pasture-grass behind them.

"Who's there, breaking th' laws o' this realm, as by King and Parliament established?" came a fat, self-satisfied voice.

"Billy Puff, I'll—I'll crack thy head wide-oppen an' show its emptiness!" cried Tim, angered to be intruded on by any man at such a time, but most of all by such an old-time enemy as the constable.

"Wilt 'a, then? That's treason, Tim o' Tab's—treason, I tell thee, as by King and Parliament established—is calling a constable o' th' peace an empty-headed chap. Howsiver, so long as Tabitha can trust ye near her fowls—I dursn't myseln—I reckon I mun let ye bide."

With this farewell Billy turned him about again, and fetched a great laugh at his own wit, and disappeared among the night-shadows; while Tabitha pressed closer to the side of Tim o' Tab's, and felt the night-wind cool upon her cheek, and wondered how it came that there should be only one man in all the moorside—only one, and he a light-fingered ne'er-do-weel, who would likely break her heart one day.

"He mun break it, then," said she to herself,—"he mun break it—an' I'll niver cry out for that, I reckon."

Tim left her by and by, and set off up the field

toward Smithbank Farm; and Tabitha leaned her trim arms on the wall and watched him out of sight.

Scent of the bruised currant-leaves, warmth of the moor-wind down the dent—and from the field above the soft lowing of a heifer as it stirred in sleep. Tabitha Hirst was to grow old one day if God spared her—but the memory of every scent and sound of this sweet summer's night was only to grow keener with the years.

Tim o' Tab's had struck up Water Lane, meanwhile, and had gone briskly forward on the Wynyates road, until he stood beneath the faintly lighted window of the room above the laithe. As of old he heard the regular quiet sounds which marked the Squire's industry; as of old, he sighed impatiently.

" Eh, Squire, but it's time ye took a bit o' rest at your age!" he muttered. "An' now I'm to be wed; an' I doubt ye'll tak it ill—I doubt ye'll tak it varry ill, choose who th' lass is."

CHAPTER XIX

EVENSONG

PARSON HORROCKS had been to visit Lavrock of the Herders, who lay ill of bronchitis; and as he came back along the dusty road he bethought him of the foot-track that went down to Goit's Mill and out into the cart-road on the farther side. It would be cooler by that road, he told himself, and moreover he ran risk of being late for evensong. The peace of a Sabbath afternoon lay over all the countryside; the cattle seemed to take their ease more restfully; the very sheep browsed with an added tranquillity, and from across the moor there came the softened cadence of the Marshcotes bells, calling the folk to praise and prayer.

The Parson forgot the lateness of the hour, forgot that soon his congregation would be raising expectant faces toward the old, three-storied pulpit from under whose sounding-board the voice of many a long-dead pastor had carried consolation or rebuke to many a buried generation of the moor-folk. He was ageing a little, was Parson Horrocks, though neither so quickly nor so sadly as his friend the Squire; he was more prone, perhaps, to dwell upon the past, and less disposed to fill every moment of the day with action; and the sound of his own bells, threading through the hum

of bees and lowing of the kine, stirred many a half-forgotten memory in him as he stood and watched the shadows climb up the grassy hollows of the fields. For thirty years he had fathered this heath-girt parish; for thirty years he had been gathering knowledge of its secrets; he had seen summer after summer bring seed and hay and harvest-time with them, and winter after winter break in upon the land, and strike it mute, and harden it on the sudden from comeliness to harshness. There was no farm, upon the heights or in the hollows, no little one-roomed cottage at the last edge of the wilderness, but what was known to him; and the broad issues of his people's lives—their summer-days of hope and of endeavour, and the winters of their sorrow—were familiar to him as the changes of the seasons. And not the broad issues only; for, just as he knew where and when to seek the first celandines, the earliest bell-heather, or dog-roses, or harebells—just as he had learned the look of every wrinkled dene upon the heath—so, too, he knew the lighter changes of the moor-folk's moods, the changes which gave colour to their character. He spoke no less than the truth, indeed, when he said jestingly, to Royd or to the Squire, that his parish was a close and tender wife to him; and his eyes were dim a little, with a mist across them, as he looked over field and farmstead on this Sabbath evening and remembered how his wedded life had run. This queer land's strength and all its weakness; its open churlishness, and the carefully hidden places of its tenderness; the knotty skew-tempered folk who had not merely settled on the land, but

who had grown out of the soil itself—he loved each separate item of his parish, and, because he had grown to love its faults as jealously as any other of its attributes, he showed himself a happily mated man.

But then the Parson was one of them. He had their own prejudices, softened only by culture and ripe experience; he had a little—nay, more than a little—of their superstition; he had their love of handicraft. The alphabet of farming he knew, and all its parts of speech; he could not only preach for the soul's welfare of his flock upon a Sabbath, but could take his coat off on a weekday and show them how to sow, or reap, or till—could drive as straight a furrow as nine men out of ten in the parish—was intimate with the mysteries of dry-walling, and knew what medicine to give an ailing cow. And so his flock brought in their tithes with little grudging, since the land that furnished them was known to their pastor, rood by rood, and cared for; nor were they at any time disposed to question the forcefulness and true inspiration of his spiritual teaching, since they knew, each man of them, how true his farming-gospel was.

And here he stood; with the shadows creeping farther up the westward field-slopes, and the bells of his own grey kirk calling softly to him from across the moor and bidding him hasten—stood, and went, with remembrance for a guide, down the rough ways and the smooth of years gone by.

"Thirty years!" he murmured. "And my love ripening all the while. Thirty years! God make me worthy of my love for Marshcotes moorside."

All that was prayerful in the man, all that was deep, sincere, and fervid, seemed loosed on the sudden from restraint; and his humility, plain in the rugged face and kindly eyes, seemed to add stature to him, and a dignity in keeping with the solemn hilltops that looked down upon his prayer. Awhile he stood there, with bared head; then, as he covered again and moved slowly down the slope, the old keen humour crept into his face.

"Well, well, it means thirty years of sermons, too," he muttered. "When will my good folk weary of them, and ask for a new turn of speech?"

And then he laughed quietly to himself; for he knew that his folk would never weary of a friendship that was built on sure intimacy and length of mutual service. His face clouded again, however, soon as he reached the second stile and caught a glimpse of the roof of Goit Mill below him. Even at this distance, and with a little warmth of leafage hiding the roof-stones here and there, Goit Mill looked cold and harsh and alien; and a strange trouble and perplexity came into the Parson's face as he looked down on it. For Goit Mill, and the new ways of which it was the symbol, formed the one evil of the moor-life which he was powerless to withstand even in slight measure. Royd's little factory in Hazel Dene was different altogether; the master's aims, the master's sense of an ideal to be striven for, had clothed it, to the Parson's mind, with a rude poetry of its own. There was play for humanity, play for a little soul-sweetening leisure at Hazel Mill; but here there was nothing but the one squalid fret of money-

making and of ill-requited toil. The Parson was not thinking now of the past happy years; he was recalling, one by one, the sights he had seen in Goit Mill, the tales he had heard whispered in hushed voices about the cottage-hearths; he was wondering anew what chanced to the pauper imbeciles whom the State, of its tender pity, handed over to the care and keep of Ephraim Booth, the master of the mill below.

His solitude was rudely broken; for over the little bridge across the beck a stumpy, thick-set figure passed, and came up the field towards him. It was Ephraim Booth himself, the master of the mill below.

"Gooid-even, Parson," he said, with an unpleasant sideways glance.

"Good-even to you," answered the other courteously.

"We're both at our trades, I reckon—ye're thinking out sermons, an' I'm thinking out bargains."

"Cannot you let barter rest for the one day?"

Ephraim Booth looked squarely at him, with the surprised air he always wore when a notion from without crossed his narrow field of view. "What, an' miss summat? Nay, Parson! We've all getten consciences, ye telled me once—an' mine willun't let me lose a single chance o' making brass. Why, I've sold three pieces sin' I left th' miln! or as good as sold em', for a bargain well thought out is a bargain made. Ye preach o' Sundays—an' I've knawn ye preach o' weekdays, too. Well, it's your trade, just as selling wefts an' warps is *my* trade."

The Parson was never one to throw religion broad-

cast; a man was an individual to him, and he met his fellows with the logic likeliest to move them. "You know the ways of barter better than myself, Mr. Booth," he said, looking at the mill-owner with that steady, honest glance of his grey eyes which was apt to disconcert less hardened adversaries than Ephraim Booth. "Yet there's a law I never yet saw broken to any good purpose. Six days shalt thou labour—it's nature's law, as well as God's."

"Ye're behind these new times, Parson, behind 'em altogether," said the other, sticking a fat thumb in either arm-hole. "I knaw nowt so mich about nature, but I've sarved my time i' th' wool trade—an' it's taught me to tak no day o' rest at all if I can help it. I'd liefer by th' half be at th' miln to-day, but they willun't let me work th' childer; so I mun use gooid time i' another way, an' bargain part wheniver a chance o' bargaining offers."

Parson Horrocks, glancing down toward the mill, saw a couple of children, weary and begrimed, come out of the mill-door; and Booth stepped hastily in front of his visitor.

"You cannot make the children labour on a Sunday? What are these doing, then?" asked the Parson sternly.

"Nay, they're nobbut 'prentices, an' they've been cleaning up th' machinery, like—we doan't reckon that as labour. Come, now," he added, with grim good-humour, "I've knawn ye preach on a weekday, so it's no more nor fair that ye should let me wark a bit o' Sundays."

"I got little reward for my pains the last time I

preached upon a weekday," put in the Parson drily. "It was at Goit Mill, if you remember, and I tried to prove to you that even the pauper bairns have souls and bodies to be seared."

"An' I said that I hed no trade wi' souls, an' that their bodies war gi'en 'em to wark wi', just as mine an' yourn war gi'en *us* to wark wi'. Theer's another thing, an' all; ye're fearful fond o' land, an' farming, an' sich-like, as if it war godlier nor trade. Well, I met Farmer Haggas awhile back, going round his fields; he war seeing how his oats war shaping, an' going ower what weight o' hay he'd ingathered fro' his meadows last month, an' looking ower a beast or two to see if they wod fetch a pund more nor they war worth. Is theer mich to choose between us, Parson?"

"I have seen Farmer Haggas's labourers, and I have seen yours," said the Parson slowly. "Yes, there's a difference between you."

"An' I could buy Haggas up ten times ower to-morrow; so I reckon I'm th' better o' th' two, if theer is a difference. Brass is godliness, an' godliness is brass, Parson—but theer! Yonds Marshcotes bells ringing, an' I reckon ye're wasting breath where it's least wanted."

Parson Horrocks scarcely heard this last rough irony. He was looking at the quiet fields, and the quiet hills, and he was repeating over and over, the mill-master's creed of "Brass is godliness, an' godliness is brass." The new days were dark to him; he could not understand this unashamed and single-minded adoration of money; he had known misers, and men who

were "near" with hard-won earnings—but never one like Ephraim Booth. He could have understood him better had he shown shamefacedness or a wish to excuse himself; but he rested, even as the Parson did, upon principles he did not question. The Parson, indeed, had met his match, and more than his match; he could meet a poacher, a labouring ne'er-do-weel, a weaver, or a comber, and get to the heart of him somehow; but Ephraim Booth had no heart to be touched, no sympathies to be roused; he was that strangest and most terrible of all created things, a man with a purpose only, a man with no human impulses to lead him into casual right-doing by the way. And the Parson shrank from him, with a sense of personal shame; he shrank as a finer nature must from such as Booth of Goit Mill, and felt himself defeated.

"Yet you see the same hills that I do—you see the shadows on the slopes, and the sunshine in the kindly sky," he murmured, more to himself than to the master of Goit Mill.

"Ay," returned the other, "I see a good few acres o' muck, an' rocks, an' benty grass. Well, Parson, I'm not a penny piece th' better for't. If I could fill all th' dene wi' milns, now, right up to Wynyates Hall, there'd be summat in't. An' I'll bid ye gooid-day, for I reckon it's nigh time ye got to your preaching, like."

The Parson scarcely noticed his rough farewell, for his thoughts were busy with the ills of this new factory-system which had for apostles such men as Ephraim Booth. It was useless to plead, to exhort—useless even to threaten, for the law was blind of both eyes

toward the mill-owners, and it was possible—nay, it was a matter of usual occurrence—that the children should be cleaning the machinery while Sabbath bells were calling folk to prayer. Hour after hour had Royd and he spent at the Parsonage, talking over trade-ways old and new, and seeking some method by which to better them; nor did they guess how many others were doing the same wherever thinking men lived within touch of looms and spinning-frames.

"We can but wait for God's good time, and pray, and thank His mercy that we have such as Stephen Royd to give us hope of better things," he murmured. "Yet, 'tis hard—'tis bitter hard to see the men and women of to-morrow in the making as Booth is making them."

He thought himself powerless to aid the children's cause; yet, foiled and baffled as he felt, the reform so soon to come was already growing in the dark—growing in the soil which Parson Horrocks and many another like him had prepared. If Royd were awake to trade iniquities, he had found his awakening at Marshcotes Parsonage; and many a word dropped by the way was already breaking in the seed.

So rapt the Parson was, and so dead to all but the crying of the children whose sorrows had grown personal to him, that he did not hear a light step on the slope, nor move until a slim-waisted figure crossed the stile and stood beside him.

"Why sir, the bells are calling you to evensong!" came a laughing voice. "You will never again be able to rebuke us for coming late to church."

He turned, and saw Barbara close beside him, her hands filled with late-flowering forget-me-nots, and her eyes more full of the old frolic than he had seen there since she had plighted troth with Bancroft of the Heights. In a moment the clouds lifted from him; Goit Mill no longer stood in the forefront of his mind, hiding sun and sky and green of the growing aftermath; for Barbara had brought the grace of past years back to him, and had added to his retrospect the freshest charm of all.

"Babette, you're better than my discourses; go preach to my weather-beaten flock," he said, standing off from her and eying her with that half-merry, half-grave air she knew so well.

Never had any lassie a better chance of being spoiled than Barbara; never was any more constantly surprised to find that she could bring delight to others. Of old, she had given no thought to herself; but lately, with the shame of her betrothal to Bancroft ever with her, she had grown full of the sense of her own shortcomings; oh! how blind these folk must be in Ling Crag and in Marshcotes, she would tell herself, not to see how little was left over when all her faults were sifted out. It was something of this sense that came to her now, as she rested her troubled glance on Parson Horrocks.

"I am not going to church to-night," she faltered. "The morning service is different—but evensong! Parson Horrocks, I cannot bear it; it is so full of forgotten things that I should only sob my heart out if I went."

The Parson remembered, with a joy that was unruly in its fierceness, the whispers that were current up and down the moorside touching Bancroft's infidelities. He wished he had proof, clear proof, of them; he all but wished that his honour was less keen, for then he would pass gossip on to Barbara and let her accept it or leave it as she would—surely anything was right that would free her from this awful tyranny.

"What is it about evensong?" went on the other, not noticing his abstraction. "There's no hour in the week so full, none that can call back other days so softly. Oh, but it's sad, if you bring a sad heart to it! The gloaming coming on the south wind through the door—and the linnets singing as if the world were all pure joy, and— But, Parson Horrocks, you will be late, and I shall have kept you, and I would not take so big a responsibility upon myself." She finished as if half in jest, but the tears were very near her eyes for all that.

"Lassie, come with me, and let God's peace draw sorrow from you," said the Parson gently.

"Peace?" she echoed. "I cannot be true to my own self—how, then, can I find any sort of peace?"

"God has a clear insight, child—he knows our motives as we never know them. So! And you shall take my arm, and I will preach a little to you, Barbara, as we go down to church—preach of a misguided sense of duty that has put you wrong with yourself and all this glad, round world."

"It was duty—it *is* duty, sir—and yet I am per-

plexed. Oh, sir, I shrink so from his touch! I cannot help it."

They had crossed the stile now that led to the field above Goit Mill, and down below them they could see one corner of the mill-yard—the corner where the house-door opened on to its paved strip of causeway. Bancroft of the Heights stood at the door, and with him was the dark-browed lass whom Royd had once surprised here soon after meeting Bancroft in the lane.

Barbara stood quite still, with parted lips, and the Parson felt her grasp tighten on his arm. They saw Bancroft stoop to the girl's lips, and heard his laugh come smooth and empty up the field, and Barbara trembled so that Parson Horrocks feared for her—until he stole a glance at her face, and saw the deep scorn that mastered every other feeling. Heretofore she had had one crumb of comfort—she had at least thought herself secure of Bancroft's love—had thought that, whatever hardship she endured in keeping faith with him, it was hardship with duty on the one hand, and a great love on the other, to make it worthy. And now it was clear that Bancroft rated her more cheaply than anyone could dare, she would have thought, to rate a Cunliffe. Love she had none to be touched; it was pride, and pride only, that was outraged.

"What, not one more?" came Bancroft's voice again, as again he stooped to snatch a kiss.

"Nay, you share them with another," the girl answered, in a deep, laughing voice.

"Not for long. Have I not said"—His voice

dropped, and neither Barbara nor Parson Horrocks cared to wait, now that the first moment of stupefaction was past.

Not till they had reached the churchyard gate did Barbara break the silence; and then she turned so tranquil a regard upon her friend that he was startled.

"I am free, free!" she cried. "I can look on the field-slopes and the moor—and know them for my friends again."

Only she knew—only the Parson guessed, hearing the gladness in her voice—how hardly these last months had treated her. The insult to her pride, the first quick sense of outrage, had gone altogether; Bancroft had given back her troth, and she had no longer to feel anything but gratitude to him.

At the porch-door she met Stephen, just going into service, and he surprised such gladness in her face that he wondered bitterly how Bancroft still contrived to make her happy. Nor did the Parson's cheery salutation rouse any answering cheerfulness, for Stephen felt that all the world except himself was making too great a show of gaiety.

CHAPTER XX

WHAT LAWYER FAIRCHILD BROUGHT TO MARSHCOTES

TIM O' TAB'S was in his farmyard this evening. He reared most things, did Tim, that could walk upon four legs or fly—he kept a pig, a couple of cows, a handful of sheep, a few hens and a half-dozen ducks; and he was successful with them all, because he loved them all and was quick to know their likes and dislikes. They, too, were not slow to know a friend, and Tim, popular as he was in the parish, was nowhere more of a favourite than in his own farmyard. The old sow had lately farrowed a handsome litter of nine, and he was flattering the youngsters to the mother's face just as lawyer Fairchild rode up to the gate.

"Hi, my man!" he called.

Tim looked round from the squealing additions to his family.

"Hi to ye, an' hi again, if 'twill do ye ony sarvice," he retorted, not relishing such an off-hand greeting—for he was on his own land now, and always felt the dignity of possession at such a time.

"Can you tell me where one Timothy Wood lives?" asked the lawyer.

Tim scratched his head. "Timothy Wood? Theer's noan hereabouts wi' that name. Nay, ye've come to th'

wrong quarter, for I knaw ivery man, woman, an' child fro' this to Marschotes, an' theer's noan o' th' name o' Timothy Wood."

"But I was told to ride up the dene here, and I should find him at the third farm on the right," said the lawyer, with a puzzled look.

Tim o' Tab's regarded the lawyer with a no less puzzled air.

"Well, they telled ye wrang, maister. What wod he be like, now? Happen ye've getten th' name a bit wrang like."

"Not I," said the other testily. "He has had a legacy left him, and the name is written fair in the will —Timothy Wood, of Benty Farm."

"Now that's queer," cried Tim, more and more puzzled; "for ye're at th' gate o' Benty Farm this minute, an' I'm th' maister on't."

"And what is your name, then?"

"Nay, they call me Tim o' Tab's, for sure; what else?" It was a matter for wonderment to Tim that anyone should be ignorant of his name.

"Yes, yes—but the surname?"

"Surname? I niver hed a name for laking wi' that I knaw on. I've been plain Tim o' Tab's iver sin' I can tell owt."

The lawyer's impatience was growing fast. "Bless me, man, had you never a father?"

"Well, I've been telled so," answered Tim drily. "Ay, I reckon I hed a father. Most on us hev at one time or another, if ye come to think on't."

"And was he without a name to his back?"

A light broke over Tim's face. "Begow, it's me ye're seeking!" he cried. "Now, who'd hev thowt it? My father war called Wood, an' so I mun be Timothy Wood, I reckon. But there's nobody like to leave ony brass to me as I knaw on."

"The wind blows legacies where they are least expected, my man, and this one is for five hundred pounds —from an aunt, it seems, who lived somewhere in the south."

"Oh, ay? That'll be my Aunt Susanna. She's th' only one o' th' Woods as iver war fooil enow to venture into the Low Country. An' she's left me five hundred pund, hes she? Well, I'm capped! for th' last time I set een on her, an' she on me, she said I war th' wastril o' th' family, an' a disgrace to all gooid Woods."

"I congratulate you," said the lawyer, breaking in on his garrulity. "I happened to have business near, so called on you in passing. Will you care for me to look after the legacy on your behalf, or—"

"To be sure, to be sure! I'm a likelier chap at rearing pigs nor looking after brass. What, then, ye'll step in an' warm your innards wi' a drop o' summat?"

The lawyer was strange to the habits of the moorside, or he would have known that courtesy demanded his acceptance of such hospitality; as it was, he gave a cold refusal, resenting Tim's plain fashion of address a little, and turned his horse about.

Tim watched him down the road, and winked sagaciously at Flick.

"Flick, owd lad, we're i' luck, I reckon," he said. "Ay, we mun be i' luck—though I'd liefer addle a

crown by poaching nor five hundred pund by this queer mak o' lawyering. Why, Squire, gooid-day! It's a fair wind allus as blows ye to Benty Farm."

Lawyer and Squire had met at the gate, and had exchanged a greeting which, on the Squire's part, was curt and nervous, as it always was when he was found talking with Tim o' Tab's or nearing the precincts of his farm.

"Good-day to you, Tim. You are watching your new litter, I see—and a fine company they look," said the Squire, very upright of figure.

"Ay, they're a fine lot—they tak after th' mother, as all good pigs an' menkind should. What think ye, Squire?" he broke off, shifting uneasily from one foot to the other. "It's a fearful queer happening, but I've hed a bit of a fortune left—five hundred pund, so th' lawyer chap war telling me."

The Squire glanced quickly at him, then was silent. "You will not care to work for me, then, from this time forward? Well, you have been staunch, Tim, staunch—you have deserved your good fortune, if ever true man did."

Tim o' Tab's came as near to anger as his easy-going temper would allow him. "Nay, Squire, I didn't think ye hed that thowt o' me! D'ye think I'm wanting to turn gentleman, like? Nay, nay—while there's wark in me, I'll wark for ye; an' if th' brass is like to stand betwixt us—why, th' brass mun go to some chap that's more use for't nor me."

There was perceptible relief in the Squire's manner as he held out his hand impulsively to Tim. "You

are worth a deeper regard, lad, than I have given you yet," he said.

"Now, now, it's all nowt when it's fairly reckoned up. I'd do more for ye, Squire, if ye could tell me how. But there's another matter, as I hevn't rightly touched on to ye yet—I want to be wed, if ye think a wench can keep a secret. I've thowt a lot about it—a lot, I hev; an' I've been feared to name th' day to Tabitha Hirst, knowing th' length o' women's tongues as weel as I do; but now there'll be scant excuse, I'm thinking, for holding off fro' wedlock."

"Why, to be sure, you must wed when you will," said the Squire, half troubled, half smiling at Tim's grave treatment of the topic. "How should I dare to step in between the two of you? So, it was this news which brought Mr. Fairchild so far afield? I am sincerely glad, sincerely glad, to hear it."

Lawyer Fairchild, as it chanced, was wondering deeply at the moment what should bring Squire Cunliffe to the farm; for he had heard sundry rumours touching Tim's devotion to the old man, and the bond that seemed to link their fortunes one to the other. He had his own opinion on the point, as every man in Marshcotes had, but he would well have liked to know the truth.

"Odd that I should meet him just now—very odd," he muttered, as he rode down to Hazel Mill. "I had him in mind all the way over from Saxilton to-day. Those mortgages, now—yes, yes, they'll suit Stephen Royd, if I mistake not."

He found Royd busy saddling his horse for the

journey down to Heathley, and they rode together as far as the corner where the Saxilton road turned upward to the right. All the way the lawyer talked of this and that detail of his client's business, and it was not until he stopped to say farewell that he let drop what was the true object of his visit.

"I spoke to you not long since, if you remember, of Squire Cunliffe? He's a friend of yours, I think you said?"

Royd nodded, then waited for the other to go on.

"He wishes to raise a mortgage—a trifling mortgage on his property—and I wondered if you would care to take it up. Your fondness for any land that borders upon Marshcotes parish led me to fancy that you might."

"Squire Cunliffe?" interrupted Royd. "Do you mean that he of all men is in need of money?"

"What would you? The law of open house is embarrassing to a man's fortunes at all times, and the Squire is no exception."

"Which part of the property is to be mortgaged, then?"

"The Hall itself. You stare? Well, well, we must not be indiscreet, but you can guess that the remainder of the estate is already plunged as deep as can be into difficulties."

Royd said nothing for a long while. He was going over the tale of his own fortunes, and matching it against the tale of the good credit he could be sure of in Bradford and in Halifax; and he was thinking, too,

of the stately, chivalrous gentleman who never showed a trace of bare pockets in his dealings with his world.

"You must secure these other mortgages, as well as the one upon the Hall itself," he said at last, in a sharp decisive voice.

"Ah, I thought you would like to have your money snugly in moor-property. Poor Squire Cunliffe! A very sad case, Mr. Royd, very sad. There should be every chance, I think, of securing all the mortgages; I know where they lie at this moment. The mortgage on the Hall I will secure at once—at once."

The lawyer bowed for the second time and went his way, leaving Royd to ride in moody silence down to Heathley. Was the whole world of Marshcotes and Ling Crag going the way of ruin? Booth had lost every penny, he himself had been beggared in more ways than one, and now Squire Cunliffe—the Squire, whom all had credited with prosperity—was one with his neighbours in disaster.

The wind got up between his horse's hoofs, and moaned—a shrill, wet wind that seemed born of the ground itself, not of the greying skies. What was the use of toil? What was the use of effort, struggle, purpose? None, said the peevish wind, and none, said Stephen Royd to his heart. They were beggars all on life's highroad, and they were happier so—he the least happy of them all, perhaps, because he still had some little property to lose.

Not at once had the master-weaver fallen into this lack-lustre-mood; he had lost Barbara, and had set his

teeth and gone forward; he had overcome his bitterness touching the Heights; but this last news of the Squire seemed the last burden to his load. For the Squire was Barbara's father, and it would be a bitter grief to the child if she came to learn in what sore straits he was.

All the way into Heathley his sour mood had the better of him; nor did it leave him until he had topped the moor-crest once again on his home-journey. It was wearing late by then, and the sunset lights were glowing all across the green-black of the heath; savage, austere, friendly in its very harshness, this corner of the wilderness touched the old chord in Stephen Royd. He would fight. Ay, though ruin were red as the sunset flames that ran from end to end of Marshcotes Moor, he would fight it; grim and long the fight might be, and ruin might have the better of it at the finish—but he cared nothing for that. He laughed, as he had laughed long months ago on the road from Ling Crag to Colne; and now, as then, a peewit answered him from overhead. He was bitter still—but it was the bitterness which struggles and prevails. And that mood held him till he climbed the steep of Marshcotes village, until he had reached home and had leisure to move up the moonlit dene. What came to him there, as he loitered by his dams and watched the moor-ripples play from edge to rush-fringed edge, he never knew; but little by little his mood changed—little by little his harshness mellowed—until on the sudden he felt himself awake—awake as he had never been till now. The sense of fight was keen in him as ever; but it was fight

of another and a worthier temper now. What had Parson Horrocks said to him long since? That struggle for one's own hand only could not bring peace—could bring, indeed, no lasting success. He had let the words slip by him then, for they seemed to fit ill with business of the mill; yet now they returned with a new force.

Ruin had been the end of Ephraim Booth, disaster had been his own portion; the Parson had spoken a true word.

"Get thee to wedlock, lad Stephen," he had said, "for only by working for another will there come peace."

His chance of wedlock was gone, but there was another waiting for his efforts—the old Squire up at Wynyates yonder, who was carrying straight shoulders under a burden grievous to be borne. He, Royd, must buy up the mortgages, one and all of them; credit he had in plenty yet, and he must work, work to make two fortunes instead of one. Something like cheeriness was in the master-weaver's face again as he realized how plain the issue was; something of his quarrel with the world seemed righted; for the first time he understood the peace, the abiding peace, that lies in selflessness.

Resolve was only in the making yet, it was true; but resolve and act were one with Stephen Royd, and it was sure he would start forthwith upon his task.

"Wool! Still wool! I shall never again get back to honest farm-tools," he murmured ruefully.

Yet work had its own sweetness, he found, as the

weeks wore on—its own sweetness, despite anxiety, despite the fear, which loomed larger every day, that he would have to pledge the Heights mortgages in order to keep Squire Cunliffe's in his hands. And when a voice came and whispered that he could not bear to part with his one chance of regaining the Heights, he turned to work with a grim face and a kindly thought behind it of the man who needed help far more than he.

BANCROFT DISMOUNTED AT THE WYNYATES COURTYARD.

understood how irksome—nay, how much of an outrage—it had been to follow the plain path of duty. And now the sense of freedom, as it had done yesterday, overcame altogether her sense of injured pride; it was as if a burden, sadly over-heavy for her shoulders, had been lifted clean away.

"Will you forgive me?" she repeated, seeing him stand there without a word. "I had no right to cause you pain."

"Barbara," he cried, gripping her by the arm, "what ails you? You're laughing at me, and all this solicitude is so much mockery."

She wearied of him suddenly, and grew ashamed that she should be prolonging such a scene. "Mr. Bancroft," she said coldly, "I do not care to give you any reasons; it is enough that I cannot marry you. And now, you will have a glass of wine with father. I have told him nothing of this, thinking you would prefer to explain it to him."

"To explain it to him?" echoed Bancroft. "What am I to explain, save that you have broken troth with me?"

Each moment he sank deeper into doubt; what did she mean, this dainty lassie who looked so steadfastly away from him? Was it a jest, or had she learned something from the gossip of the country-side? Nor would she give him any further light upon the matter, but turned abruptly through the meadow-gate on the far side of the courtyard.

Bancroft laid a hand upon his bridle, as if he were minded to ride off at once in a fit of spleen; then

glanced at the girl's retreating figure; and last of all he was decided by seeing the Squire come down the long stone passage that led to the hall-door.

"Why, then, lad!" the old man cried. "Do you doubt your welcome, that you stand shiftless there?"

"To be truthful, sir, I do, though a few moments since I thought my welcome always sure at Wynyates."

"Nay, nay! Am I bewitched, or are you past your wits? *You* unwelcome here at Wynyates—'tis the first that I have heard of it."

"Yet Barbara has told me as much just now. She wishes to be free again, sir."

Squire Cunliffe rested both hands on his cane and stood there, a picture of dismay and wonderment, framed by the dark woodwork of the doorway. "I cannot credit it," he said.

"Nor I, until I remember how she looked at me—and her voice, with the nicely-cutting scorn in it. Neither would she tell me my offence—"

"Offence? There's none," said the Squire peremptorily. "A maid's whimsies, Dick, a maid's whimsies; think no more of them. Pish! I was man enough at your age to know what these April gusts should mean."

"She is in earnest, sir, I think, and yet I cannot give her up."

Bancroft was in earnest, too; for the further Barbara receded from his hopes, the more he longed for her. It was well enough to play false with her, and well enough to set prudence in the fore-front of desires; but when

he was brought face to face with her, and found coldness where there had once been something warmer, he could think only of her beauty, of that proud winsomeness which appealed so strongly to his own rougher instincts.

"What reasons did Barbara give you?" said his host, after a silence. "I am perplexed altogether, Mr. Bancroft. She would have spoken first of it to me, surely, had this been true."

"Nay, she seemed to be jesting, sir, when she bade me come to you with explanations, and yet—"

"Mr. Bancroft, you will find the child and ask her to come to me here at once. I do not choose to talk of jests in connection with my daughter's hand."

Bancroft of the Heights had shown to little advantage with Barbara, but now he looked more ill-at-ease than ever. The Squire's breeding had always disquieted him; and to-day he was conscious of a certain scornful ring in the old man's voice which was new to him. It seemed, indeed, that his position here at Wynyates was changed entirely; yet still there was no reason given; and now he was bidden to go over the country-side seeking Barbara, when Barbara had shown herself so markedly wishful to avoid him. He came out of a moody spell of thought, and strove to recover his old jaunty stride as he crossed the yard and opened the meadow-gate through which the girl had gone.

"Fool that the lad is, fool!" muttered the Squire. "I should have known that the little maid could not bear with him for long. And yet her word is pledged, and she'll not break it now; I almost wish that it were

possible. The sadness of it! And she doing all for my sake, as she thinks; and I going blindly forward in the dark, doing this and that to ensure her welfare and seeing it turn to ashes. Babette, Babette! And you're so like to what your mother was."

His eyes sought the little strip of garden that flanked the house-front; for it was here that Barbara's mother had loved to loiter when the sun was going down behind the rough head of the moor above, here that she had planted musk and rosemary, pansies and shy London pride. Not a flower there was now but spoke of her; not an odour but called up some forgotten speech, tender or wise or playful, that had passed between them. And again a great cry escaped him, a bitter cry of, "Babette, Babette!" as he thought of what the child of all this tenderness was like to come to.

Barbara herself was close at hand, though he did not guess it; for she had turned up the meadow-track and had come round by the path between the mistals soon as she saw that Bancroft of the Heights was gone.

"I'm here, daddy," she cried, in answer to that low passionate cry of his.

"Ah, the picture of her! The picture!" he murmured, regarding her with a far-off glance that saw the buried years alone. "Just as she used to come, with trustful eyes and the sunlight on her hair—and she had pansies in her hands, blue pansies, with the fragrance that brings heartsease, so she said. Why, child!" he broke off, passing a hand across his eyes, "I thought—I fancied— Nay, never mind what I fancied, or you'll think I age too fast."

"I shall always think that, father—even if you aged a day only in a year. Dear, you must not grow any older—never, never!"

"Barbara," he said by and by, "I have had Bancroft here, with some tale of a lover's quarrel."

"He did not tell you the cause of it, then?"

"Not he—for he did not seem to know."

"I think he knew too well, though it may be he did not guess that I had learned his secret. It is no pleasant thing for me to tell you, father, and I put off the moment—"

"Should'st not have done that, lassie; are we to begin keeping secrets one from another at this late day?"

Barbara turned toward the laithe and looked up at the dusty, cobwebbed window of the Squire's workroom. "What, have we no secrets?" she cried.

The Squire shook his head with would-be playfulness. "Only the one, Babette. Tell me, child, has Bancroft been unfaithful?"

She bent her head; and the Squire, not needing to ask any further question, put his arm close about her.

"No need to ask if you regret, child," he said.

"But you, father, you? I had no choice but to break troth, yet—"

"You had no choice, that is enough," he said. "And what if I confessed—ay, for it's true!—that I am wondrous glad to have my little maid again?"

"You shall keep her, dear! Indeed you shall keep her, for she never wished, did she, to leave old Wynyates?"

"Maids always say as much, until— Well, well,

Babette! It was scarce courteous of you to send Mr. Bancroft to me in the fashion that you did."

There was demure mischief in her face. "Perhaps he did not merit courtesy; besides, I could not stoop to accuse him, sir, of this and that."

Bancroft's search for his mistress, meanwhile, had proved unavailing, though he had met with Parson Horrocks on the far side of the meadows. The Parson stopped on seeing him, and stood across his path.

"Good-day to you, Mr. Bancroft. We are well met," he said.

Bancroft glanced uneasily at him, for he misliked the tone, the uncompromising rebuke in the Parson's face. "It is always well met, I trust, sir, when we pass the time of day. Why more so than usual?"

"Because I was on my way to see you, and have saved myself so much good time wasted. I wondered if you had been up to Wynyates yet."

"I have just come from there."

"That is a pity. I had hoped to save Barbara the trouble of dismissing you."

"Sir!" cried Bancroft, "sir, I do not understand! You are an older man, and your cloth—"

"Oh, never heed my cloth! I'll take my stand on manhood, if it pleases you. You were at Goit Mill yestereven, I think? Ay, for I saw you there, and Barbara saw you."

The other's face grew long. "She saw me? Saw me with—with Booth's daughter?" he stammered.

"And heard a little of your talk as well. So one

mistress did not content you, Mr. Bancroft? You must have the bonniest maid in Marshcotes, and in your leisure go hanging to the skirts of country wenches? Barbara owes you thanks for it, though, and so do I, for I would rather see her wed any man in the county than yourself."

Quiet as the Parson was, his voice was shaking. The indignity of it was coming home to him afresh; that this upstart, feather-headed ruffler should have dared to claim the touch of Barbara's hand—that he should ever have been admitted among them as an equal—seemed an outrage. The proud moor-blood in him was stirred, that quick instinct of exclusiveness which rated all men born off the heath as foreigners; Bancroft was an alien, and a thin-blooded one to boot.

"You were ever kindly toward me, Parson," said the younger man with a sneer. "Do not mince your words, I beg."

"It is not my custom, sir—least of all to yourself. 'Tis idle, I suppose, to ask if you mean to wed this girl of Booth's?"

Bancroft had lost all hope of Barbara now, and no longer cared to hide his intentions. "You may ask," he said, "and I will answer. I mean to wed her, and have done so this fortnight past. It seems strange, does it not," he went on jauntily, "that I should make such choice?"

"It seems vastly in keeping with what I should expect of you—entirely in keeping, sir."

"I have been wronged—*I*, Parson, not Barbara,"

cried the other, stung by the sneer. "When I asked for her hand, I understood that the Squire was what he seemed."

"Have a care, Mr. Bancroft! I can listen patiently to some things, but—"

"Oh, I have nothing to say against him, except that appearances belie him. I thought him rich, and find him in the same difficulties as myself."

"You are misinformed, sir, or you are trifling with an honoured name."

"Nay, for my lawyer dropped a hint—no more, but enough to tell me what I had never once suspected."

"Your lawyer is a fool, then, for his indiscretion. Pah, you are shallower than I thought, sir! First to confess so candidly that it was the fortune, not the woman, whom you sought; then, to accept on hearsay this unlikely tale."

"I remember many things, Parson, which had escaped my mind. I have been wronged, I tell you, and I care nothing for your honoured names. When first I asked for Barbara's hand, the Squire was strange in manner, so I thought—asked me if I would wed his daughter if she were penniless, and yet did not confess as much in open fashion."

"To which you answered that you cared not whether she were rich or poor? Ay, ay, I can hear you saying it—can hear you saying it. Mr. Bancroft, I would I were a younger man—I would that a hunting-crop were seemly in a parson's hands—and so good-day to you."

The Parson walked briskly up the path, without

salute, without other farewell of any sort; but by and by he dismissed Bancroft's memory with a shrug, realising how little worthy he was of honest anger, and what a debt of thankfulness was due to him from Barbara's friends. He was nearing Wynyates now, and his thoughts turned toward Squire Cunliffe; were his fortunes as desperate as Bancroft had given him to understand? He could not credit it; for was he not the Squire's oldest friend, who had been in and out of Wynyates at all seasons, who had exchanged close confidences at that warm hour when gloaming deepens toward candle-time and draws a man's heart out of him? It was not possible that disaster should have brooded over Wynyates, and he not caught some hint of it.

Yet the Parson was not tranquil. Like Bancroft, he remembered little signs that he had neglected to interpret—signs of growing thriftiness in small matters, of growing anxiety upon Squire Cunliffe's part. He recalled how often he had seen the Squire's glance fixed on Barbara with a wistfulness he had not been able to interpret. Was it possible that he had seen ruin draw so near that for the maid's own sake he had been eager to provide for her?

"We have been blind, blind!" he cried, coming to a sudden halt. "Why did not Royd guess it? Why did I not see how desperate a motive he must have had to accept young Bancroft as a suitor? Stephen would always wait, wait; I warned him of it—warned him, too, against that pride he had in seeming poor to the Squire and all his neighbours."

He went forward again slowly; and then on the sudden he lifted his head, and saw that the Squire himself, not a score yards away, was watching him with a quiet smile. The sight reassured him; what were a few wind-words of Bancroft's, a few remembered nothings, when measured by this tranquil air with which his friend regarded him?

"I never saw you moody, Parson—never till to-day in all the years I've known you!" cried the Squire.

"Maybe, maybe; for you never saw me deep in doubt about—well, Cunliffe, about your own welfare. You have looked harassed now and then of late, and I was wondering if land were proving a cruel stepmother to you, as it has done to many another on the moorside."

The Squire took out his snuff-box, and tapped it gently as he offered it to his friend. "Land should not be cruel to us, Cunliffes—we have loved it overwell," he said. "What is amiss with you, Parson, to let such fancies bear you company?"

"Nay, they are gone! I feared, because your welfare, and Barbara's, is dearer to me than my own. Where is the maid? I promised to come up and see how well her brood of speckled chickens thrives; she had the eggs from me, and I feel the full weight of responsibility, Squire."

Again the Squire smiled, with less constraint. "You will find her in the garden," he said—"and she has begun to sing again, for a reason that she'll tell you, haply, if you ask for it."

"Her spring has come, maybe—and, like the thros-

tles, she must voice it. Well, well, we can have our spring but once, Squire; pray God that little Barbara's may not be marred."

"Pray God it may not," echoed the other, with something of his old disquiet.

It would have brought a bitter smile to the face of Stephen Royd could he have heard the reason of Barbara's happiness; for this very morning he had been compelled to choose between two alternatives, and had raised money from his bankers on the Heights mortgages. Wynyates was safe as yet, but whether he would be able to hold fast to that mortgage depended altogether on the issue of the next few weeks.

CHAPTER XXII

A SACRIFICE

LAWYER FAIRCHILD, as he sat in the office that topped off the narrow, ill-paved main street of Saxilton, was turning over some papers and smoothing his clean-shaven chin. He looked out as a horseman clattered up to his door, dismounted, and came in with a brisk, decisive step.

"Stephen Royd—ay, he knows his own mind always, and he walks like it," he murmured. "Good-day to you, sir, good-day! The morning is crisp for the time of year, eh? Crisp and clear, with more sunshine than we've had of late."

"More sunshine than I care to see," said Royd. "I had liefer have grey skies and murk, Mr. Fairchild—they suit my temper better, and always did."

"Now, this will not do! This will not do at all. Had I your advantages, Mr. Royd—"

"Yes, had you my advantages, you would be astonished," put in the other drily. "I called to ask about the mortgages we spoke of a fortnight since," he added presently.

"I have secured the one upon the Hall itself, as I promised, and there is even less difficulty about the others than I anticipated. In fact, the present holders

seem anxious to dispose of them, as there is a feeling that the property is fast depreciating."

"And the interest? Do you fancy Squire Cunliffe contrives to pay it regularly?"

"Until now he has done—but whether it will be forthcoming in the future, I cannot say."

Royd tapped the table impatiently. "There's danger of foreclosure, then?" he asked abruptly. "That is bad hearing, Mr. Fairchild, for I cannot secure the other mortgages at present."

The lawyer glanced at him, amazed. "*You,* Mr. Royd? You, too, begin to talk of poverty?"

"Since last seeing you, yes. Booth of Goit Mill is bankrupt—Earnshaw of Bradford is bankrupt—and to-day two other creditors of mine have followed suit."

"Yet your mill is not standing, and the demand for cloth has rarely been brisker. Surely—"

"For all that, I have little but debts to show; with hard work I may just contrive to escape disaster—but I've no capital to advance on mortgages."

"Humph! I am sorry to hear it, on your own account and on the Squire's. If anything should happen—if he should find himself unable to pay the interest—he would never get over the blow of losing the old property."

"He need not lose the Hall, at anyrate. I must scrape together enough to purchase that."

"Ah, but you know the Squire—I know him, too, though better by reputation than in person. He is proud, sir, proud to his finger-tips, as all you Ling Crag folk are."

"He is old, too, and the world has bowed his shoulders," murmured Royd. "You are right, Mr. Fairchild. He must not be put to any shame, any trouble—"

"Well, now, cannot we avoid it? Surely there's a way of some kind to be found."

"Yes," said Royd slowly, "there is a way—there is just one way and only one."

Lawyer Fairchild, cool man of the world as he was, did not guess the struggle that was going on in his client's mind, nor know that during the few moments' silence Royd had made the greatest sacrifice which was left to him to make. The mill-master no longer saw the table, with its littered sheets of parchment and the rows of deed-boxes above it; he was looking at a long low house, from out whose every window some memory seeemed to beckon him; to give up the Heights was to give up the solitary hope that still gave purpose and a show of warmth to labour; the Squire could have asked no greater deed of abnegation in return for past kindnesses shown to this orphaned lad of Jasper Royd's.

"Well, Mr. Royd? What think you?" said the lawyer, as still his client kept silence.

Royd looked up, with a sudden air of determination. "Shall I find you here this afternoon?" he asked. "Good; I must ride on at once to Bradford."

The lawyer sat playing with his quill after Royd had left him. "Hard and soft—knotty as a bit of oak, yet soft beneath it all—they're a queer race, these folk of Marshcotes and Ling Crag," he muttered. "Now, what has Stephen Royd in mind? For a man on the

edge of bankruptcy to go buying mortgages seems absurd—but then he's wilful, and always was. Successful, too—he'll find a way out, if I mistake not—a way out for the Squire and for himself."

Royd was at least finding a way out for the Squire, as was plain when, later in the day, he drew rein again at Lawyer Fairchild's door. "I have borrowed from my bankers on the Heights mortgage," he said.

"On the Heights mortgage?" cried the lawyer, lifting his eyebrows. "You will pardon me, Mr. Royd, but I should not have thought you willing to put that in danger."

"I am not willing," Royd answered grimly; "but what other alternative is left me? I might borrow on the security of my goods—I had thought of doing so, indeed—but these other losses have crippled me too far."

"Then frankly, sir—as lawyer with client—what are your plans for the future? I was anxious that you should take up these Wynyates mortgages, but not at such grave risk to yourself. Suppose more sums go the way of those already lost?"

"I must take the chance, that is all. If we wait, there is every likelihood that the Squire will find the mortgages foreclosed. Do you not see, there must be no delay?"

"I see that two of you may very well become bankrupt, instead of one. However, Mr. Royd, I have no right to urge you further; you wish me to purchase?"

"I do, and at once. You will advise me directly you have word of them?"

Lawyer Fairchild saw him to the door. "What will the end of Royd be?" he muttered, as he watched the big roan horse go down the street. "He's the sort of man who hacks and hews his way through life—and they succeed, yes, they succeed, until life turns round on them and says, 'No further.'—Bless me," he broke off, smoothing his chin with one plump hand, "bless me, am I to begin moralising at this end of a busy day? Tut, tut; it is not to be thought of. Yet Royd? I find him much on my mind nowadays; he's his father's son, and one remembers many a buried story of old Jasper."

Royd himself had turned over Millgate Bridge by this time, and was breasting the sandy road that led upward to the moor. He felt no exaltation, scarcely a touch of pleasure, in the thought that he had saved Squire Cunliffe from disaster; for renunciation, after twenty years of fighting for his own hand, does not come in gentle guise to any man. Nay, it was altogether bitter, he told himself; for unless the tide turned speedily, the Heights mortgages would pass into another's hands.

"I had rather see it burned before my eyes—burned," he cried, with a sudden impulse of rebellion, as he gained the summit of the farther hill and saw the Ling Crag moorside stretch wide toward the sky-line.

So intent he was upon the scene that he did not hear a second horse come up behind him at the trot, until a hearty voice called out to him to halt.

"Now, lad, your face has thunder in it. What is

amiss?" cried Parson Horrocks, as Royd turned in the saddle. "There, now, you'll tell me you were thinking of business and the price of yarn. See you, Stephen, I care not what the price of yarn is so long as I can see the sunlight washing yonder slopes, and hear the lavrock overhead. Business, forsooth! I begin to wonder if I ever taught thee thankfulness."

"Maybe I was not thinking of business, sir, at all," laughed Royd. "Do you see the spur of moor across there that shelters Wynyates?"

"Ay, and I've news for you from Wynyates—have had these two days past, but I could never find you at the mill. Say, Stephen, where have you been of late, that none of your friends have been able to set eyes on you?"

"I have barely slept at the mill for the past few days, what with Halifax market, and business up and down the country-side. Times grow more difficult each day, Parson."

"Ay, and touching that, what of our friend the Squire? I heard some disquieting rumours not long ago from Bancroft of the Heights, but would not credit them. You know nothing, Stephen, I take it?"

Royd leaned forward, on pretence of adjusting his horse's bit. "I am not in the Squire's confidence so much as you are, sir—though more, I should have thought, than Mr. Bancroft is."

"Ah, well, there's naught but idle talk in it, I warrant, for Bancroft was ever one to listen to tattle. The Squire does not give us that impression, eh? I could

have laughed when last I saw him, at the thought that he could carry threadbare fortunes under such an air as his."

"If his fortunes are threadbare, sir, he carries them with a straight back."

"Ay, and I am glad to have his own word for it that he lacks nothing. Do you know, Stephen, I have strange thoughts touching Squire Cunliffe. What if he is searching for no Philosopher's Stone at all? What if there's some invention working in that nimble brain of his? He labours so lovingly, so ungrudgingly, there *must* be something worthy underneath it all.

Royd glanced up. "I had never suspected him of that," he cried, in sheer surprise. "Why, sir, he hates the very name of trade; is it likely he would work to further it?"

"I cannot tell. Men's minds are stranger than we give them credit for, and he may well have an overmastering passion of the kind—a passion for creating, apart from the use to which his machinery is to be put. Mark my words, lad, we shall see some great thing issue from that room above the laithe, and I should not like to think that my old friend was crippled in any way by anxiety or lack of money."

"He need not be crippled, sir," Royd answered, with a straight glance at the Parson and a sudden lifting of his moodiness. His sacrifice seemed worthier now, as if one half its bitterness had been removed by this suggestion of the Parson's.

"How mean you, lad? A moment since you spoke as if you knew nothing of his affairs, and now—"

"Why, he shows no signs of poverty—did you not say as much? And as for Bancroft's gossip, he is windy as a night of March."

"He had a reason, moreover, for belittling the Squire's fortunes. What think ye, Stephen, this ruffling owner of the Heights gave me not long since as excuse?— Ah, but your pardon; you have not heard the news yet."

"I have heard no news, sir, except of tops and noils and other greasy items of my trade."

"Well, then, I shall play with thee a little, for showing so gloomy a face as thou didst just now. What if Bancroft of the Heights were to be wedded within the month?"

Royd's horse, not liking his quick jerk at the reins, sprang forward and all but unseated him. "Steady, fool! steady," he growled, pulling up at the top of the long rise.

The Parson followed at a pace more leisurely, a quiet gleam of humour in his face. "Well? No answer to my question, lad?" he asked.

"I wish little Barbara well at all times—but—I had not looked for the marriage to be made so soon. Neither did I fancy you would accept it with such gaiety, sir, if the truth must out."

"Stephen, I'll not play with you again—you catch fire over-easily. Bancroft *is* to be wedded within the month, but not to Barbara."

"I'm stupid a little, Parson, or your jests are not as plain as might be."

"Nothing plainer," broke in the other cheerily.

"Mr. Bancroft credited the rumour he had heard touching the Squire's poverty, and he was in pressing need of money. Beggars cannot be choosers, as he admitted to me with unblushing frankness, so he must needs pay court to Ephraim Booth's daughter."

Royd said not a word until they reached the foot of Marshcotes Street. It was strange to see the light, as of a dawn, creep over the familiar fields—strange to realise, little by little, that Barbara's happiness was not to be thrown as a plaything to Bancroft of the Heights. Of himself he had as yet no thought at all; it was the sense of the child's escape that gave a new warmth to sky and earth—a warmth that was so reflected in his face just now as to make the Parson smile.

"There, Stephen! That is likelier. You used to wear that sort of look when you were a lad, before the hardness crusted you. I was minded to give Bancroft a horse-whipping the other day, but soberer counsel told me that we owe him gratitude. He's likely, too, to repent his bargain, if all I hear be true."

"Yes, it is true. Booth of Goit Mill is bankrupt, as I know by the loss of three thousand pounds. He'll not wed the daughter now, I take it."

"Not he. Now, Stephen, we're at the hilltop, and you must come and sup with me. I have a hundred things to talk of."

"I'm with you, Parson—and we must drink to Barbara's freedom."

"But where's your talk of ruin, lad?" asked the Parson, with a shrewd glance.

Royd's face grew grave again, as he followed his

host in silence up the lane. For ruin was one of two alternatives which by and by he must meet—the likelier of two alternatives, indeed—and not himself only, but Squire Cunliffe and Barbara, too, would be dragged down by his own failure.

"So Booth has lost everything?" said the Parson musingly. "Well, he knotted the whip for his own back, as I foretold. Lad, but he'll have leisure now to hear the crying of the children! Leisure to hear it —and grace to repent, maybe, if I can help him to it."

CHAPTER XXIII

THE RUFFLER'S FARE-YE-WELL

BANCROFT of the Heights had declined all responsibility with regard to Booth's daughter, just as he had broken faith with Barbara. The mill-owner had stormed in vain, had threatened in vain; threats and rough speech alike had broken harmlessly against the younger man's smooth carelessness. Nor would Bancroft leave his house as yet; so long as he could scrape together enough to pay the interest on the mortgages, and enough to squander in roadside taverns, he meant to keep his ground against all adverse comment of his neighbours. Yet Stephen Royd knew —what many guessed—that this ruffling owner of the Heights could not hold up his head for long; and he wondered gravely whether he or another would reap the advantage when the mortgages fell in.

For trade was going from bad to worse, so far as the owner of Hazel Mill was concerned. Bad debts had multiplied, speculations had miscarried; work as he would, his capital was dwindling perilously near to the point when he would have to pledge the Wynyates mortgages or abandon trade for good and all. He kept aloof from Wynyates nowadays more carefully than ever; for he was conscious of a certain embarrassment—a sense of shame almost—in meeting Squire Cunliffe now that he had learned the secret of his

poverty. He shrank from meeting Barbara, too, under the changed conditions; and when she thought his greeting cold, if they chanced to meet on highroad or on moor, he was telling himself that she would shrink from speaking with him until her pride was healed.

The shadow of trade depression, too, lay over all the moorside, and Tim o' Tab's was the one light-hearted man among them, so it seemed. Tim had reasons, however, over and above the gaiety which carried him at most times on the topmost wave of life; for Tabitha Hirst had promised to go to kirk with him as soon as October was well through.

"I'd liefer not bide so long, an' that's truth," said Tim, upon a day of September; "but saying ye've no reasons willun't alter matters, I reckon."

"Lasses niver need reasons; I thowt ye knew as mich as that, Tim. There's too mich to be done, an' all, i' th' house here an' about, to let me wed afore next month."

"Well, I'll hev so mich more liberty, an' that's summat. What dost think I war saying to myseln last neet, Tabitha, as I looked across th' benty fields, an' watched th' hares go crop-cropping i' th' moonleet?"

"Nay, some mak o' fooilishness—that ye'd liefer hev a hare i' th' field, happen, nor a wife i' th' house-place. War that it, Tim?"

"Mebbe. I'm noan so fain to be wed after all, Tabitha, though I hev getten a bit o' brass now to lay by agen th' day they land me into gaol for poaching."

Tabitha leaned over the low wall that flanked her father's bit of garden—the wall up which the currant-bushes grew giving their bruised sweetness to the

evening wind. "We'll cry off a bad bargain, then," she murmured. "Ye've getten your nets an' snares, an' I've getten likelier wark nor looking after ye; an' I'm thankful we've fund it out i' time, Tim."

"Ay, it's as weel," he said, and took her to him.

And both laughed then, softly, while the breeze came pit-a-pat and honey-laden from the upland heather and sported round them as if glad to find kindred spirits here at play.

So well did Tim urge his suit that Royd, striding down Hazel Dene an hour or so thereafter, was met, as he had been upon a night of the past summer, by the lilt of a poaching-song—

> "For a hare is fond of a parsley-sprig,
> As a mare is fond of corn,"

the blithe voice came.

"Tim, you rogue, the spring is over and done with," cried Royd, as he stopped for a moment by the stream-side and watched the other put his spoil away. "How dare you sing such songs?"

"Nay, th' spring is nobbut just beginning, maister —for ye an' me."

"That is a dark saying; we are not all of us poachers, Tim, nor farmers—"

"Nor bahn to be wed. Well, I'm bahn to be wed for one, an' they say there's another like to follow suit afore so varry long. Bless ye, Maister Royd, I'd liefer see ye go to kirk nor go myseln, though Tabitha be th' bonniest wench i' Ling Crag, saving one."

"Your thoughts run in a softish groove just now,"

said Royd, with an unquiet laugh. "It's well to be a man of fortune, Tim, with no anxieties beyond the ailments of your cattle or the price of combing."

"Eh, but it's fair a pity to hearken to ye, maister! I met ye here i' th' spring, an' ye war blithe as could be—ay, I could a'most see ye tickling trout again, as I war doing not long sin'—as ye used to do yourseln as a lad. An' now ye're as grave as can be, wi' niver a thowt for th' brighter side o' life."

"Times alter, Tim, as you'll find one day, perhaps. But there! I felt young again, when I heard your song come up the Dene. Could I hit a sitting hare now, think ye?"

"You could aim true, maister, if ye tried higher up at Wynyates yonder," Tim answered, with sly meaning. "What, mun ye go? Well, gooid-neet to ye, gooid-neet. Ye'll come to my wedding, like, Maister Royd?"

"If all's well. Good-night to you, Tim, and a soberer tongue."

Royd had scarcely turned toward his mill when Bancroft of the Heights came down the field-path.

"Why, Mr. Royd, by all that's wonderful!" he cried unsoberly. "I walk to-night, you see, instead of riding, from the Bull at Marshcotes."

"One rarely finds you off the bridle-tracks," the other answered. It was the first time they had met since Barbara's dismissal of her lover, and Stephen marvelled to find that he felt so little hardship in the meeting; nay, his contempt was such as to rob him of any wish except to be courteous.

"Do you guess the reason? No? Well, I have played my last card, Mr. Royd, if it will gratify you to know it. My last card! Horses sold—house mortgaged up to the hilt—even the furniture will have to go. Regret it? Not I. If I can ride, I ride; if I cannot, I walk, and it is never far to the next tavern."

"It would seem not to be. Well, Mr. Bancroft, you have my sympathy."

"Not at all, sir," disclaimed the other airily. "Not at all, sir! I play a ruffler's game, and I play it to the end; and now I must take to my travels, and see what certain friends in Lancashire will do for me. It's very odd," he went on, with a confidence induced by much old wine, "but I cannot guess who holds the mortgages. The interest is long over-due, and yet there's no pressure put on me as yet."

"There may be by and by," Royd put in drily.

"Nay, for I've thrown it all up, and the mortgages will fall in. Will you come farther up the road with me, Mr. Royd, and drink a last bottle with me at the old house—*your* house, as it once was? Come, we've been enemies, but what of that? Bankruptcy should cover all such quarrels."

Jaunty, careless, unabashed as ever, the man roused a feeling near akin to admiration in Stephen Royd; indeed, he had never shown to such advantage as now—now, when all was over with his fortune and he showed himself ready to meet the future as he had met the past. Something—a whim it may be, or a sudden instinct of perversity—moved Royd to accept the other's offer. After the dull round of the past

months, there would be a spice of frolic, after his father's own heart, in going up to the Heights to drink farewell to the man whose mortgages he held. But the impulse passed, and he held out his hand.

"It is over-late, Mr. Bancroft, but you will take the will for the deed, I know," he said. "Enmity? There's none between us, or I should not be wishing you good-luck in Lancashire."

Bancroft swayed a little as he grasped Royd's hand. "Fare-ye-well, then, if you will not come. Shall I ask pardon for making merry in your house so long?"

With a boisterous laugh he turned and went up the fields, with light, unsteady steps; and that was the last Royd ever saw of him. Like a will-o'-the-wisp he had moved about Marshcotes parish; like a will-o'-the-wisp he disappeared to-night up the steep slope and over the moonlit hill-crest.

Very still Royd stood at the corner of the path. The moment for which he had striven, for which he had hoped and watched, was here at last. The Heights was free of those who had supplanted him. He had looked for a supreme moment of delight; he had foreseen a ride to Wynyates, to tell Barbara the tidings; yet the issue had been moulded by a stronger Hand, and all his house of dreams was scattered down the wind.

The mortgage would fall in, and he had scarce enough with which to hold fast to the Wynyates deeds. Nay, if his last venture proved to have miscarried, he would be in Bancroft's case, and the old house would pass to aliens once again. A month ago the old Ishmael

would have leaped out; he would have mocked and railed at destiny and gone like a storm-wind down the dene; but to-night he crushed the impulse.

"What must be, must," he said, with grim resignation; "and men are fools to lay any plans for a score of years ahead."

If it had been hard at sixteen to be beggared of home and fortune, hard to begin the uphill climb, the effort needed in these latter days was greater than any but himself could know. The glow of boyhood, the fine, careless flow of spirits, the uncertainty and adventurousness of everything, had carried him up the first difficult rungs of the ladder; but now he had to set foot again upon the bottom rung, to retrace the well-known difficulties and tedious steps of the first enterprise. Week after week went by, after this last meeting with Bancroft of the Heights; and still his credit wavered, doubtful to which side of the balance it would turn. He no longer spent any of his evenings in the little room beside the mill; but Tim o' Tab's could have told of many a night-meeting on the moors.

"He walks as if Judgment war behind him," Tim would mutter at such times, "an' I can see he's thinking, thinking; an' sometimes I wonder if Stephen Royd will hod his head up i' spite of all, or whether he willun't. Ony road, he frames like a stiff un, an' he'll win through, if ony wishing o' mine can help him to't."

Even the Parson saw little of Stephen nowadays. Royd held his peace, and sought the sympathy of no man; and if folk thought him once again an Ishmael, he did not undeceive them, nor say how sacrifice for

old Squire Cunliffe's sake was beginning little by little to make his burdens lighter.

Yet for all that, it was bitter hard. He watched the farm-folk at their tasks, and envied them; he heard the hunting-horn go echoing up the farther reaches of the moor, and the blood ran merry in his veins for one forgetful moment; and the weeks wore on to months, and trade showed little movement yet to one side or the other.

It was in the very midmost of the struggle that he met Barbara at the head of Water Lane. A crisp October had brought the bracken on the moors to its full glory, and two stalwart fellows were plying scythe and fork, to win home fodder to mistal or to stable. Barbara, as she came up the lane, had stopped for a moment to watch the golden mist that overhung the labourers—a mist so fine and so threaded by the yellow autumn sunlight that it seemed scarce palpable. With each load tossed on to the growing heap, the dust grew thicker, yellower, until the men's brown faces shone with a softened light that gave new dignity to their serious, square faces and brawny arms.

So absorbed was Barbara in watching the scene that she did not hear Stephen until he had come close beside her and had lifted his hat to her in greeting. Her face flushed for a moment, then grew white again as she held out her hand.

"You are going to Marshcotes?" she asked.

"Yes, and you?"

"I, too, am going that way, to see if Parson Horrocks wants any of my summer's honey. Perhaps you,

too, would like a jar, Stephen, if mill-masters eat anything so trivial," she added, with one of those sudden glimpses of frolic which still showed themselves amid her late-found gravity.

"I should like as many jars as you will give me. Why, it will be luxury, Barbara, to have honey on my breakfast-table."

"They say you starve yourself, Stephen," she said, after a pause, "and I begin to fear it true when I see how out of health you look."

"They say all manner of follies in this parish of ours, Babette—at Wynyates, for instance, they say I forget old friends because I do not visit them."

"They do, indeed." She drew a little nearer to him as they walked. "Is it quite fair, quite generous, to let us stand altogether out of your life? It was the same before the summer came, and now again you have fallen into the unkind habit."

"Ay, but I've been busier than you know of. Guess where my thoughts were, child, when I met you on the moor just now?"

"Of the sunlight and the wind, I hope."

"Of tallow—just tallow."

"Do you trade in everything?" she laughed. "I could never understand what was meant by business, Stephen. First, it is wool you deal in; then something different altogether."

He was looking at her, half laughing and half with serious meaning. "That is speculation, Babs—we stand or fall by it, the most of us. Suppose, now, I had been advised from Russia that the price of tallow

had gone down, while here it showed a tendency to rise? What should I do, think you?"

"Being prudent, you would buy, I fancy."

"That is just what I told my agent over there to do, not long ago; and tallow did not rise in price, Babette; it fell instead."

"You are making me quite wise!" she cried. "Surely I am favoured, Stephen, this morning?"

"I'm talkative, maybe; it seems so long since you and I had breakfast together at old Wyecollar. So tallow fell in price, and I was left with a few hundred barrels of it on my hands; and now I want the money."

"Cannot you sell, then, at a loss?"

"I shall have to do, unless the market strengthen quickly; and that will mean—what will it mean, child?"

"Oh, that you'll be poorer by a little, that is all. Why sound so grave about it, Stephen?"

"Only because it will mean the difference between bankruptcy and a narrow escape from it—the difference between a chance of fortune, Babs, and total loss of it—the difference between—"

He stopped, and she looked up at him, startled by the sudden meaning in his voice. There was no need to finish the speech that had fallen so unexpectedly; no need to seek interpretation of the glance he gave the Heights, which looked down upon them from its garden-trees above; and Barbara, for all her grave disquietude, could not help smiling at the thought that no likelier a matter than the price of tallow had loosened Stephen's self-restraint.

"You—you shall have the honey by and by," she

murmured; "it may stand between yourself and famine —who knows?—before the month is out."

"Don't jest, child!" he said abruptly. "Before the week is out I shall know all, and there's much hangs on the issue."

"Then perhaps—if we are not forgotten quite—you will ride up and tell father and myself how you have prospered. Father says little, Stephen, but he feels your lack of—shall I call it courtesy?"

"Call it prudence, Babs, and be sure I've done with it so far as Wynyates is concerned."

She held her hand out to him with shy frankness as they reached the Parsonage gate. "Good-bye," she said—"and the best of fortune, Stephen."

Royd walked soberly down the flagged way that led to the Bull tavern; he had not seen Barbara for so long, as he had said—nor had he guessed of late how closely, how persistently, the freshness of her charm, as of a moorland breeze, had been with him through all the months when she had seemed remote from any hope he once had felt of winning her.

The customer he sought had not yet reached the Bull, but he chanced on a sorry picture in the bar—a rough-set man, unkempt and heavy-eyed, who sat with a pewter mug beside him and stared into the glowing peats.

"Gone, gone! An' I'd slaved for't! An' now there's nowt. Folk willun't lend—men I could hev bought up three times ower not long sin'—they willun't lend me a crown-piece. I've lost my brass—an' theer's nowt left to live for—an' I dursn't die."

He lifted a haggard face, as Royd halted on the threshold and turned as if to leave.

"Oh, it's ye, Royd o' Hazel Miln?" he snarled. "Well, I've kept *ye* out o' a bit o' brass, an' that's summat. An' now I've nowt to do, save drink myseln into forgetting. D'ye see 'em yonder? D'ye see 'em?" he broke off, with a sudden fit of shivering, as he pointed to the corner of the room.

"I see nothing," Royd answered, "except the firelight on the cupboard door."

"But I do! Little childer—dead an' buried, some on 'em, up on th' lonely moor—an' some are wick as scoprels, wi' hands an' feet all working, working.—Royd! Quieten' 'em, quieten' 'em! Ye niver did 'em harm; they'll hark to ye. Feather! Jonas Feather! Willun't ye come? More drink, lad, more drink! I mun hev more drink to drown these little uns 'at want to kill me."

His head dropped heavily between his hands, and Royd, seeing no chance of giving help, turned slowly and left him there; and he shuddered to see retribution overtake any man in such a guise. His thoughts were quickly turned into another channel, however, and one more pleasant.

"Ah, you're here, Mr. Royd! I have good news for you," cried a little, bright-faced man who all but ran against him in the passage.

Royd recognised his agent, who had come up by coach from London; and in spite of himself, his voice trembled. "Well? We have had no newspaper up here as yet, and I know nothing of the market."

"It has risen at last. It will rise further. Wait, sir, wait—say, a week—and you secure a handsome profit."

"Ah!" murmured the other, with a long sigh of relief. "Feather, lay covers for two, and see that the wine is good."

The landlord stopped in his hurried progress down the passage. It was unusual for Stephen Royd to give such hospitable orders.

"Trade's mending, sir, I take it?" said he.

"Mending, Jonas. Be speedy with the dinner, for my friend here will be cold after his long journey."

Barbara had found the Parson, meanwhile, among his graves, and had passed a light arm through his. "Do I bring fair weather with me, sir?" she asked.

"Always, I think—and, see, there's a Michaelmas daisy opened its round eyes to look at you, and the lad's-love still keeps its green." He stooped and gathered her a sprig of southernwood, and plucked the flower and handed both to her with his stateliest bow.

"You remember all my little likes," smiled Barbara, "for southernwood, I think, is dearer to me than any green thing growing."

She rubbed the kindly herb between her fingers, and Parson Horrocks, watching her, smiled at the old characteristic action.

"Lads'-love, they call it oftener," he said, with a sly glance at her. "A pretty name, Babette."

"Yes, 'tis pretty, sir. What then?" she asked, with downcast eyes.

"Nay, I was but wondering how you came to like the herb so well—wondering about many things, child."

"Have you noticed any change in father lately?" said Barbara abruptly. "He ages fast, Parson Horrocks, and yet he will not give up the work that takes him every night to the room above the laithe."

"I have been thinking much of him, and more of the work he does. Suppose we were all mistaken, Babs? Suppose it were no fantastic search after magic stones that he was making? As I said once to Stephen, he may very well be working at some great invention; I have heard of men being ridden by such labour to the exclusion of all else."

"You think that it could be? Indeed, I have made many guesses, sir, but never one so curious as yours."

"Yet Tim o' Tab's is vastly useful to him; and yesterday, when I was up at Benty Farm, I found him burning charcoal—not for himself, for he burns only coal when combing. Charcoal, Babs, would be the fuel needful for the Wynyates work-room, where little smoke is wanted; and Tim will know as much as Stephen Royd, I'll warrant, about the details of machinery, and so his services are doubly precious to the Squire."

"I should like to believe it so," said the girl musingly.

"Ay, and that is why I show so great a curiosity about it; 'twould ease my mind, as well as yours, could I feel that he was following some such useful task."

"And yet I cannot think it—he would not surely be so bitter against trade if he were inventing machinery to help it on? It was this feeling, you remember, that first—that first came between Stephen and himself."

"Scarcely came between them, child; and now they are warm friends as ever. Eh, lassie, but it's good to feel that Wynyates has come back to its old restfulness!"

She understood him, and flushed slightly; then smiled, as he had seen the sunlight creep and broaden over the dawn-grey moor.

"I think, sir, we are a folk to ourselves up here," she said.

"Yes, yes; I knew no good would come of it when first an alien settled at the Heights. And now there's a chance for Stephen to come to his own again, and he'll not let it slip, I fancy."

"I wonder do you mean to offer me cake and wine, Parson Horrocks?" said Barbara, demurely mischievous.

"There! I grow inhospitable with old age, and I believe a saffron cake is waiting for you—you were ever partial to it, were you not?"

He opened the gate and bowed her through with playful ceremony, and she in turn made him a low curtesy.

"Babette," he said, "you're the bonniest thing in all the moorside, and may I be forgiven for telling you so."

The same thought was in Stephen's mind as he came out of the tavern an hour or so thereafter and caught a glimpse of Barbara at the churchyard wicket; but he was younger than the Parson, and so he held his peace.

CHAPTER XXIV

CHRISTMASTIDE

AUTUMN and winter were over, and still Royd was working all his days and half of many nights. The speculation in tallow that had turned the balance had brought him more than he had hoped for at the time; and since then the tide had turned altogether in his favour.

They said in Marshcotes that Royd's luck was unconquerable, and that he had emerged from trade-difficulties with an ease no other man could have expected; but the record of the mill-master's days would have shown a different reason for success. Six months might count for little in the round of humdrum work, and it might well seem to his combers and his spinners that Royd had come easily by the money lately earned; yet each moment of each day had been full of deep anxiety and deeper effort; each moment, in the first month of strain, had found him busy, not only with his own affairs, but with the constant need to keep in mind Squire Cunliffe's welfare rather than remember his own grey outlook on the future. Without hope for himself, without love, with scarcely an ambition, he had fought his way at the beginning of this, his second probation; and even when Barbara was free

and the Heights once more within his grasp, he could not bring himself at once to let the sense of strain grow less.

Only at rare intervals had he felt the buoyancy of success, that buoyancy which in old days had now and then surprised him in the midst of his Ishmael-like withdrawal from his fellows; but he would pause sometimes, when the sweat of conflict ran too thickly down, to taste that peace which lay deeper than any feeling of mere buoyancy could reach.

Little by little, meanwhile, he was putting capital away, until with the spring of the next year he was able to redeem the mortgages upon the Heights. The interest on the Wynyates property was paid with a regularity which he found a trifle disconcerting; for he knew the old Squire to be in dire straits, and if it were true, as Parson Horrocks had hazarded, that he was busy with inventions, then he would doubtless need all, nay, more, than the slender stock of money at his command.

"What can I do?" he would ask himself, time after time. "I could return the deeds to him, but he would think it an insult to his pride; I could send word through Lawyer Fairchild that the interest need not be paid, but then again he would resent it. It is hard to think of him up yonder, penniless almost, and without a hope of gaining more—unless, indeed his inventions were to bring prosperity." He smiled in dry fashion. "Bring prosperity! Inventions are not wont to bring in money, until some idle fellow has added a touch of his own to the machine and claimed all the

profit. Besides, he should have money now—now—and there's no way of persuading him to acceptance of it."

He sought the Parson's advice, without telling him more of the Squire's affairs at Wynyates than that they were embarrassed. And the older man thought long about it; but could come to no better conclusion than had Royd himself.

"Best leave it for awhile, lad," he said at last. "If his affairs grow hopeless, you may step in then and rescue him; or if you should weary of seeing the best thing in life slip through your grasp—" He did not finish his sentence, but glanced up at Stephen with the old droll air.

Royd shook his head—the mark of obstinacy which he had learned long since from his father. "The Heights needs money yet, Parson—a round ten thousand to put it into trim and to maintain it. And ten thousand is long in the making sometimes."

"Foolish lad! You were the same in the last spring, when you talked of it as though all must be done to a house before you deigned to ask a mistress to come to it. All or nothing with you Royds—well, go your own way, and we shall see what comes of it; but if you find an empty nest under the grey house-eaves up yonder, you need not lay the blame on me."

Royd laughed as he went his way, and only settled the more doggedly to work after listening to the other's warning. And still his business prospered; and the old habit, discontinued for awhile, held with him still—that nightly walk up Hazel Dene which gave him a glimpse

of the Heights gables. There was a rarer happiness to him now, however, in the pilgrimage, for he had all but lost this house of dreams—had held it lost, indeed, for many an anxious month while he was working for the old Squire's peace of mind. And now that it was his again, there was a new light upon the house, upon the guardian trees, upon the steep green slope that wandered downward to the beck; for abnegation had touched success with something finer than he had understood in olden days.

"Well, Stephen? Does the old house look friendly to you nowadays?" said a voice at his elbow, as he stood at a December gloaming-tide and watched the frost-sky redden behind the shoulder of the hill.

"You here, Squire! I little thought to see you at this hour in Hazel Dene."

"Did you not? Yet I have business with you, and very pressing business, seeing it is Barbara's. She wants you to be with us on Christmas Eve, according to old custom."

"I shall be glad, sir—nay, the season would lack all its warmth if it were passed anywhere except at Wynyates."

"And you will spend the night with us? Yes, of course, of course. And now walk with me, Stephen, as far as Marshcotes Parsonage for I have a like invitation to carry to the Parson."

Royd followed him down the narrow track. "You are kind to bring the message in person, Squire," he said.

"Well to speak truth, Stephen—I felt some repara-

tion was due to you. You have been so seldom to Wynyates of late, and we have missed you, and I fancied you were drifting into your old way of keeping aloof from all your friends. It is a bad habit, lad, a bad habit."

"And so it is, Squire, and one I hope to be able to abandon by and by."

"You mean to go back to the land?" said the other, with a quick glance.

"All being well, within the next few months."

"Lad, that is good hearing! The land is the only foothold for a gentleman, and it is unseemly in a Royd to go moving day-long among wool and cloth and spinning-frames."

Land was the only foothold for a gentleman. The phrase lingered in Royd's mind during the week that followed; it expressed so clearly what was his own belief, and it was, moreover, so oddly out of harmony with the Parson's suggestion as to what went on by night in the old laithe across the courtyard.

"There'll be a white Christmas, if this promise holds," thought Stephen, as he took a farewell glance at the sky. "That is as it should be, too, at Wynyates; green winters suit the old house ill."

And white it was before the dawn, with snow still drifting out of the murky sky, with a piping northern wind, and hoarse complaining of the grouse. Then the sky cleared, as if by magic, and the blue shone bright with a frost that held for longer than any man in Marshcotes wished it to.

"Ah, this is the old times back, and the old

weather!" cried Parson Horrocks, as he and Stephen rode to Wynyates on the Christmas Eve.

"And there'll be the old sense of home about the place," said Stephen. "Upon my word, Parson, I begin to wonder which is dearer to me—Wynyates yonder, or the Heights."

So deep in snow was the house shrouded, that, as they rode up the lane, the gables and the chimney-stacks showed as so many rough lines and hillocks of fleecy white; the horsing-steps were scarce distinguishable, the trees dropped silver splashes as the wind swayed their branches in the moonlight. Fair as a dream the old place was, and soft as in dreamland fell the last wandering snowflakes of a shower that until now had hid the moon's face outright. A foot-track had been hardened all up the winding road from Ling Crag village, for there was no child in the parish but knew the good cheer offered every Christmastide by Squire Cunliffe's kitchen.

Roomy, full of queer nooks and angles, the white-washed kitchen was the cosiest corner of all the house, when, as now, a great fire roared up the chimney and the pewter dishes ranged along the rack shone like so many red-grey eyes. The bread-creel overhead was weighted down with mistletoe and holly, set in between the crisp brown leaves of oatcake. Full of great stir it was to-night, as little Mistress Barbara stood at the table with a piled heap of Christmas cheer before her, and the bairns came forward one by one to have their hands over-filled. The Squire stood by the hearth, trim

in his dress, cheery of face and voice, and passed a quiet jest now and then with Stephen Royd; the very cat upon the hearth, dozing with paws outspread toward the blaze, seemed full of seasonable cheer, and the children's voices echoed shrilly in the rafters overhead.

The Squire was close on seventy now, and he could remember no Christmas Eve at Wynyates here that had not known the children; many he could recall when the gentry, too, had danced the morrow in—but dwindling fortunes had forbidden any such brave show of late. He could remember when Barbara, grown now to womanhood, stood at this same table and scarcely reached the top of it as she used to play the part of Lady Bountiful. Stephen was a fine-grown youngster in those days, and always claimed a sort of right in the little mistress; even now he had something of the old lad's look about him to the Squire, as he watched the rugged face go soft at pleading of the children for this or that upon the board. Well, Barbara and he should have been mated by this time, if all had been as he had prayed for; but Bancroft had stepped in between and he had tried to choose for Barbara's welfare in giving his consent.

The old man sighed amid the merrymaking. For Christmas brought home to him some bitter thoughts among the kindlier ones—thoughts of prosperity that had been, and of the galling uphill road that he had trodden since his fortunes dwindled. And under all else—under the fret of present trouble and past dis-

aster—was the memory of Barbara's mother, with her delicate, proud face, and gentle voice; and that memory, if sad at all, was sweeter than them all.

His musings were interrupted by the sound of a firm step along the passage and the rush of fresh air through the opened door.

"Peace to this house," said Parson Horrocks, standing big and ruddy in the doorway.

"And peace to your house," answered the Squire, as he went and gripped his old friend by the hand.

Time-honoured as their Sunday bottle of port at the Bull tavern, the greeting had passed between them every Christmastide for close on forty years; and for near twenty years the Parson had claimed the kiss with which he greeted Barbara, and the deft word of flattery that brought the roguishness into her cheeks.

"And Stephen, too," he cried. "Why, then, we're all together here—your family, Squire, your family."

He glanced merrily at Royd, and then at Barbara; for ever since young Bancroft had forfeited his claim in Barbara, the Parson had allowed himself to be well pleased whenever these two were together. Truth to tell, he wondered why Stephen had let the grass grow under his feet for so many months; surely, however anxious he had been to make his fortune all again before he turned aside from the single-minded pursuit of trade, the time had come long since when he might speak; for he did not guess that Stephen, cool and straightforward in all other matters of this life, was sadly perplexed where Barbara was concerned—perplexed, yet mindful of a certain far-off day at Wye-

collar, when they had stopped in the old lane for a long searching glance, and had learned the true way of their hearts.

The children, no longer to be gainsaid, began to clamber up the Parson, or to clutch his hands, or to offer him of the good things which had been given them; and only when a second rush of cold air followed the opening of the kitchen door, and Tim o' Tab's came in with Tabitha, did they forsake one cherished friend for another.

"Timotheus, I wish you better things than you deserve; come, 'tis Christmas-time, and even your nets and snares must be forgiven you this once."

"Ay, I reckon they mun, Parson," Tim answered cheerfully; "they're gooid friends to a man at Christmastide, if ye come to think on't, an' they say there's to be hare for dinner to-morn at Marshcotes Parsonage."

"Gossip, Tim, pure gossip; never heed it."

Tim did not answer, for he was looking at the Squire, and the Squire at him, and when they gave each other Christmas greeting there was a gravity in the poacher's voice, a weariness in old Squire Cunliffe's, which seemed apart from the spirit of the season. When Barbara intervened, however, the wickedness returned to Tim's uninjured eye, and the laughter to his voice; and by and by he was playing blind man, surrounded by a score of laughing bairns—for Tim understood all children as well as he understood Flick, his terrier, or any other boisterous living thing.

"Tabitha, I took a great care on my shoulders when

I wedded you to Tim," said the Parson, with a hand upon her shoulder. "Tell me, does he wander out o' nights, or have you cured him for the most part?"

"Nay, sir, theer war too mich wanted curing, an' I started ower late. But theer! He's Tim, for all that, an' I wodn't swop ony lass i' th' moorside."

"Well, well! What it is to have a good wife to say the best for one! Tim, remember that you never will deserve your good fortune."

"I'll try, Parson—for I've a sort o' feeling ye're right, though I'm noan just pleased that Tabitha should hear me say't."

The Parson laughed, his round, contented laugh, that somehow always brought sinners to a conviction of his goodness and his peace with all men; and by and by he linked his arm through Royd's and followed the Squire and Barbara into the warm, low-raftered parlour. The log-sheen seemed cosier here by contrast with the snow which lay banked upon the window-sill or which fell in solitary, ghost-like flakes athwart the panes.

"This is an old-fashioned Christmas, Squire. It brings one's boyhood back," cried Parson Horrocks, rubbing his hands before the blaze. "Ah, Babette, you're over young to know the winters that we used to have! The world was not so weary, I think, then as now."

"Is the world weary?" murmured Stephen, his glance instinctively seeking Barbara's. "I thought it gaining every day in vigour, sir."

"Hark to him, Squire! A pinch of snuff with you.

Hark to this boy who finds the world all that it used to be to us. Are we to take it kindly of him?"

"Take it very kindly, sir—and be sure that if I grow older with the comeliness of certain of my friends, I shall be well content."

"Oh, fie, lad Stephen, fie! This is not like your wonted speech at all. Where is your sobriety, and the plain speech that you love?"

"There's a house upon the hill, Parson, where my folk lived once on a day—where *I* am free to live at last—and that has stolen all my soberness away, I fear."

The Squire, taking no part in the talk, was eyeing Stephen gravely; he had grown so used to think him poor that now it was hard to realise how rich he was, hard to realise that he had done with trade for good and all, and that he was destined, if all went well, to enjoy his own again. The pity of it! If he had but known this when he forced Barbara into the arms of Bancroft of the Heights, how differently he would have acted. But he had not known; and Stephen had been sent to the wall in favour of the weaker man. Long ago as it was, the hot blood stirred in Squire Cunliffe as he thought of Bancroft's treachery; it was an honour that Barbara should have stooped to him—and he had shown his sense of it by paying court to an unlettered wench. Poor lassie! Poor Babette! Not because Bancroft had set her free, but because she had ever been in any sense at his command.

"Come, daddy, you're not one of us to-night at all," said Barbara coaxingly. "What is it, dear?"

"Old memories, maybe, child; they crowd in on one at such times," he answered, stroking her upturned face.

"Yes, they crowd in on one," Royd murmured. "Even I have lived long enough, sir, to hear many a ghost go rustling up and down the parlour here."

Barbara half turned her head, but would not look at him.

"Dead laughter, and dead songs," the old Squire murmured; then, with a sudden return to self-possession, "Stephen, I am a poor host to-night," he said. "Ask Barbara to sing to us, until the ringers come."

She scarce needed the invitation, but sat down to the spinet, and smiled a little softly, and sang the ballad which long ago had grown to be a bond between herself and Stephen.

"I know a maiden kind and fair,
Was never maid so pleased my eye."

The words rang clear and sweet, and Stephen felt the old dreams return upon him in a wave; all the late coldness, that had lain between them, all the deep sense of loss when she had plighted troth to Bancroft, all the fears he had felt for her, had yielded to the kindliness of the season and the hour. The Parson, smiling quietly, watched them both—the maid who sang and the man who listened—and it came to him that now at last the desire of his life was nearing fulfilment. On and on went Barbara, from ballad to old ballad, while her father sat with his eyes upon the fire

seeing dead faces there—while Stephen, too, watched the fire-face take all one living shape.

The Squire dozed by and by, and Parson Horrocks, with a roguish face turned sideways to the spinet, avowed it his intention to join the children in the kitchen once again. They scarcely heard him—Barbara at the spinet, and Stephen standing by her as she sang. Something had come to both of them to-night; the season, with all it meant of old association—the wintry rustle of the wind without and the warm glow within —the sense that each was free to take up friendship where they had lost it earlier in the year—all was like some charm, beneficent and righteous, that lay over them.

> "And change the earth, or change the sky,
> I shall love her till I die,"

finished Barbara, and sat with head bent over the keys in the attitude which Royd so well remembered.

"The words are new to-night, and the air is new," he murmured.

"Nay, but they are old, Stephen,—so old I almost feared to sing them to you."

"What ails me then? For they're so different altogether—deeper, and truer, Babs, I think."

"It may be you are happier—is it so?" she said, after a silence. "You came to-night like one who had brought us some good news."

"And so I have, but you're not to know it until Christmas morn, when all gifts should be made."

"They are made on Christmas Eve sometimes; is it not a prettier custom, Stephen?"

"Fie, child! You must not yield so to your curiosity."

"But you are happier? It is news of your own fortune, I know. And I am glad, for you have been so harassed and so quiet of late."

Again there was a silence, broken by the old Squire as he turned uneasily; then he was quiet again, and the voices of the children rose and fell from the distant kitchen. And still the silence held them, until Royd suddenly stooped down, and turned her face to him and held it so. "Babette," he said, "I don't know whether my fortune is good or bad. I came to ask you."

"You—you came to ask me?" she faltered.

"Yes—to ask if— Child—you must know I've loved you these long years past," he broke off, his voice deepening, his whole air growing masterful. "What have you to say to me?"

"No, Stephen—please, not yet! Do not ask me for an answer yet. I—I do not know myself—"

"Close upon twenty years I've waited, Babette, and I'm impatient."

"You should have learned patience, Stephen, in that time, I should have thought," said she, with a flash of her old self. "Oh, but I wish you had left it there, left everything just where it was."

She began once more to run her fingers lightly across the keys, but he took and held them prisoners. "You shall give me an answer now," he said, smiling a little

at his own bluntness; "there's only one Christmas gift I crave, and that is you. Babs, I know what you're thinking—that you were not always free to listen to me—that another came between us once—yes, but you were never bound—never."

"I was never bound except in name," she repeated, with a straightforward glance that met his and fell again. "That is a true word, Stephen;" she shivered a little, for even yet the thought would return to her at times, bringing a sort of sickness with it, that Bancroft of the Heights had come very near to wedding her.

Royd saw the action, and his heart leaped to know that Bancroft had never neared even the threshold of her favour. Clear-cut as the blue moorland sky that had framed it, he saw again the picture of that summer's day at Wyecollar, when Barbara and he had climbed the old Hall carriage-way, and had stopped half up the slope to read what was plainly written on each other's faces. She felt his mastery, and tried to combat it; for she was proud, and shy, and doubtful of all things just now. Yet under all there was the pulsing glow of life, and the memory of days gone, and the feel of summer's dawns and wild November's sunsets that had seen Stephen and herself grow into comradeship.

"We were good comrades once," she said, following the thought, and striving still to hold him at arm's-length.

"And now we're more, for you love me, child," he cried, and there was no gainsaying him.

The snowflakes, falling sparsely, seemed to come peeping in at the parlour window, and to halt a little ere they fell, as if they would see more of the light and warmth within. The wind came fluting at the panes, and went again with a hungry wail across the shivering moor. The red-eyed peats stared up at old Squire Cunliffe, dozing still in the great chair by the hearth. But Barbara's hands were fast in Royd's now, and homeless wind and shivering snow were both forgotten.

The moments passed, and still they kept the same rapt silence, until at last the Squire began to mutter in his sleep.

"Tim should be coming for it on the morrow," he was saying. "Ay, Tim will come for it—and I must have it ready. Pound after pound—is the charcoal lighted, think you?—pound after pound—"

"Father is ill-at-ease to-night," murmured Barbara. "What has troubled him so much of late, I wonder?"

"Perhaps I will tell you before to-morrow's finished."

"You?" she cried quickly. "Do you know, then, and have you never told me? That was not kind of you, Stephen, when you knew how anxious and how troubled I had been."

"But the secret was his, not mine; even now he does not guess how much I know."

On the sudden there came the sound of merry voices from without, and then the muffled beat of footsteps crunching the frozen snow.

"Noel, Noel! Peace on earth and to this house,"

cried a stentorian voice which all within the parlour recognised as Billy Puff's.

The door was opened to them promptly and they trooped into the kitchen—a brisk, frost-reddened company, each man with a bag of green baize across his shoulder, and each man leaving a little track of snow behind him as he walked. The children were finishing the last game of blind-man's buff, and their mothers, busy some with getting shawls in readiness and some with supper of spice-bread and cheese, were be-rating them with brisk cheeriness.

"Now, bairns, we've come to waken Father Christmas!" cried the leader of the ringers.

"Ay, they've come to waken him right enow, an' he's bahn to come wi' a pack on his back, same as t' ringers here," said Tim o' Tab's to the little lass who was clinging to his hand. "Thee bide wakeful to-neet, lass, an' tha'll see summat tha niver seed afore."

"She willun't," struck in the mother drily. "Christmas is Christmas, but a lean larder's a lean larder, an' there's little goes into a stocking, as t' saying is, when there's little to be fund i' th' house."

"Well, now, we niver can tell; I've knawn sich things happen myseln—ay, I've knawn sich things happen," repeated Tim, with a thought that at least one stocking should be well-filled that night if he had wit to find a way. "Come, lads, ye mak a fearful lot o' to-do about your bits o' bells," he broke off, as the ringers laid out the green bags upon the table and began to place their bells in order.

"Tim o' Tab's, ye've no head, an' niver hed, for sich matters as bell-ringing," said Billy Puff, with more than his usual importance. "It taks brains, lad, to keep i' time an' tune."

"I've heard so," Tim agreed—"but I niver reetly thowt it true—for I allus said to myseln, 'Why, *Billy Puff* can ring a bit.'"

"Fratching an' sparring, an' Christmas morning all but on ye!" cried one of the women. "Shame on ye, Tim o' Tab's."

Tim laughed light-heartedly. "I mean no harm, nowther does Billy yonder," he cried; "but we've allus liked to dust each other's jackets a bit."

"Nah, lads! Are ye ready?" said Billy, lifting one bell with his right hand, and holding the other ready in his left.

"Ready!" answered all, and down came ten right hands, and out across the firelit kitchen rang that music of the hand-bells which to Barbara was the sweetest of all sounds she knew.

She was standing in the doorway now, with Royd beside her, and behind them the old Squire and Parson Horrocks. "Noel, Noel, Noel," they seemed to echo and re-echo, these bells of Yule which had been rung at Wynyates here since she first learned to walk. They were plaintive, maybe, but it was with the plaintiveness that young people only know—the vague sadness that looks forward, not backward only, and sees the rosy future beckoning up the stair of life. The very attitudes of the ringers were familiar as the housewalls themselves—Billy Puff, with the moisture getting

thicker and thicker on his broad, red face, and his consequential manner heightened tenfold by his sense of leadership—Shackleton o' Hoyles, who was spare as Billy was rotund, and who rang with nervous twitches, as if there were a foeman close behind him, knife in hand—Dick the Tinker, with his face of brass and his steady swing of right and left. Year followed year, and still they were the same folk who came to ring Christmas in at Wynyates here; only the children seemed to change much, and some of these were mothers now who were only elbow high when Barbara first remembered them. The picture was a fair one, and it was apt to live in the girl's mind the long twelvemonth through—to live, and to bring peace with it.

Change after change was rung, until the children had all gone, and the great clock in the chimney-corner pointed to the midnight hour. The windows were opened then, and the bells lifted all in readiness, and when the sharp wind bore the sound of Marshcotes steeple-clock across the moors, the merriest peal of all rang out into the snowflakes and the frost. And there was hand-shaking to follow, and lusty voices rising in praise and thankfulness—Barbara's high notes threading through Royd's bass and running forward to join the gruffer tones of Billy Puff and his associates.

The old Squire broached the ale-barrel then, and Barbara slipped quietly away into the parlour.

"Now, lads, a carol before you drink!" cried Parson Horrocks. "And then a blessing on the food—and after that—why it is late in the day to teach you what rightly follows a carol and a grace."

"We knaw reet weel, Parson," laughed Tim o' Tab's; "an' we should do, seeing th' store o' Christmases 'at th' Squire hes seen us keep at Wynyates."

"You have helped the Squire to furnish forth the feast, belike," laughed Parson Horrocks.

He was thinking only of the grouse and snipe upon the supper-board, but the Squire turned sharply to him with question, surmise, and surprise all written plain upon his face. Tim o' Tab's, too, laughed with a shade of disquiet as he denied all share in such provisioning, and the pause which followed was so strained that even Billy Puff, amidst his close attention to his plate, felt that something had gone amiss. The pause was broken soon, however, by Tim o' Tab's, and thenceforward there was no cessation of chatter and rough jest until the last of them had gone their ways down the white lane with the trodden, ice-bound path showing black against the snow. The wind had fallen now, and the dry crispness of the night kept Royd and Parson Horrocks at the door long after the ringers had passed out of sight.

"Another Christmas dawn, lad Stephen," said the Parson slowly. "Ah, well, there are few left to us who have seen many. It is as well, maybe—for there is more good that side the Veil, lad, than ever we shall find on this."

"There is good everywhere, Parson—and may God make us thankful for it," answered Royd, with a sudden deepening of the voice.

"Eh, that sounds unlike you, Stephen—is it as I said? Do you recall what I once told you, how you

laboured all for self in the old days. It was a house you wanted, and a wife, and riches—and then the card-house dropped a-pieces, and you found sacrifice your mistress. Well, is she as bad a mistress, as they say?"

"She is hard, and she is tender underneath—like the folk who live upon the uplands here, I think. Nay, Parson, I have nothing but thanks for what I lost—and gained."

The other looked upward at the sky, bright now with frosted stars, then at the shrouded strip of garden; mystery on mystery there was—the stars in far-off space, and near at hand the sleeping roots of flower and herb, that would one day wake in answer to the spring. So still it all was, so full of the silence that probed below the littleness of speech; and he was part of it; and Stephen here was part of it; and on the hills there was the beckoning hand of endeavour and of sacrifice.

"Well, let us to bed," he said, after a long silence. "The Squire will think us scant of courtesy if we keep him longer. It is Christmas morn; have you no confidences for me, Stephen?" he added a moment later, and his tone was almost wistful.

"You want the old tale, sir, I know," laughed Royd, with a glance at the candle-lighted windows close behind them. He would not tell the Parson yet what he could tell him if he would; for there was something sacred in the confession he had lately won from Barbara.

"How sweet the night is, Parson Horrocks," came the girl's voice from down the passage.

"It is sweet as little Barbara herself—but over-cold for her," the Parson answered, turning to meet her lest she should forget how lightly she was gowned. "Ah, we have found you, Squire! I was telling Stephen here that you would be wanting us to bed."

The Squire carried a bunch of keys in one hand, a candle in the other, as if he were bent on seeing to the fastenings of the doors. "Nay, not so fast, Parson, not so fast!" he cried. "You must take a glass of wine with me—and you, Stephen—to usher in the day."

"Not to-night, Squire. We'll let it mellow, if it please you, until the dinner-hour."

Suggestion and reply were as of old, and Royd smiled across at Barbara to hear the well-known interchange of courtesies. Then Barbara bade them a good-night and fair awakening, and they watched her climb the stair, a slim, straight figure, white against the dark old balustrade.

"I have had a Christmas gift to-night, sir," said Stephen then, seeking the Squire's glance and holding it—"a gift that needs no wine to better it."

The Squire did not grasp his meaning. "A gift, Stephen? Has Babette been keeping something for you against the day?"

"She has, sir, if you'll consent, that is, to the transfer of the gift."

"Why should I not consent?" the Squire began; and Parson Horrocks gave the answer.

"And you never told me, lad, just now when I invited confidence," he cried. "Do you not understand, Squire?"

A curious light came into the Squire's face—a flush of pleasure first, and then a sudden pallor. "What is the gift?" he asked hoarsely.

"Barbara herself—Barbara, whom I've worked for, Squire, more years than I remember. Will you give her to me?"

The Squire was silent for a long moment; then, "I will not," he said slowly.

Royd stared in sheer surprise, and so did Parson Horrocks. Refusal—though he had not counted on it—Stephen could have understood; but the curtness of it took him by surprise.

"You will not, sir?" he echoed. "But I—have confessed my love to her, and she cares for me—"

"It cannot be, Stephen," the other interrupted. "And now, not a word more of this, so that we may be good friends still. Your hand on it, my lad."

The younger man held out his hand mechanically; why had he not seen this beforehand, he was thinking bitterly—seen it before he asked for Barbara's confession? It had been so easy, there in the candle-lighted parlour, to plead his suit at first hand—but now his haste took on another aspect.

As for Parson Horrocks, he was dumbfounded. That the Squire should ever have urged young Bancroft's suit had been a wonder to him; that he should refuse Stephen's was beyond belief. Stephen had been his favourite from boyhood; nor did trade stand between them now, as it had done of old. Of a clean, straightforward life he had always been, and now he

was rich and master of the Heights—what ailed the Squire to deal so curtly with him? But the Squire's lips were sealed so far as that topic was concerned; awhile since he had thought it easy to acknowledge Stephen's claims; but he could not, now he was asked, for a plain yes or no, let Royd enter into any such compact without telling him more than he had confessed to Bancroft of the Heights; and he was too proud even yet for any such confession.

"A farewell pinch with you, Parson. Stephen, a pinch with you. And a good night's rest be waiting for you on your pillows," said the Squire, taking down the snuff-box of black oak which held the place of honour on the mantel.

Puzzled still, they took their candles from the little table by the door, while their host struck flint to tinder; and Stephen, catching sight of the old man's face at unawares, saw that deep lines of distress were in it, and that his bearing, straight a moment since, had changed completely when he thought that none observed him.

"The Squire ages faster than he ought; there's secret trouble of some sort at work," said the Parson, as he and Royd went up the stair together.

"Yes, or he would not have denied me Barbara, and given no reason. Well, we must wait, Parson; and that is one lesson I have mastered well—to wait."

"Keep a good heart, lad, and *trust;* his reasons will one day come to light, and you can show him then how little they are worth. What, Barbara and you not come together? As well part man and wife."

The Squire himself, meanwhile, had seen to the fastenings below-stairs, and once again, as on Barbara's birthday-night, he went out by the side-door and crossed the mistal-yard. The silence seemed to deepen as the night wore on, the starlight struck more wan upon the snow; a little wind had risen, too, and its touch was cold and wet. There was no owl upon the gable-end to-night, nor any sound except the sleepy rattling of the cattle at their chains from a mistal near at hand. The old man, wrapped none too warmly against the cold, shivered as he moved to the foot of the stair leading to his work-room, and slowly mounted to it. He was cold in body, but colder still in mind; for to his fancy disaster seemed to crouch upon the very threshold of old Wynyates. He closed the door behind him, and presently a light shone through the blurred window-panes; and after that the sound of feet going heavily across the boards—going heavily and at constant intervals—stole out into the silence of the night. To and fro, to and fro, with now and then that sound as of a falling tool, which Tim o' Tab's had hearkened to upon a summer's night gone by. All else were abed in Wynyates—the maids, and Barbara, Royd and Parson Horrocks—and if two of them at least were wakeful, it was no such wakefulness as kept the master of the house from out his bed.

The Marshcotes clock sent its note twice across the shrouded moor; and still the Squire moved to and fro, and still the house slept on, until a band of waits came up the road, and broke suddenly into the Christmas hymn.

"Christians awake, salute the happy morn," rang out the wondrous song.

Once more the heavy tool fell to the floor overhead, as if the Squire were startled; and the leader of the band, pointing upward to the lighted window when the carol ended, asked how it came that Squire Cunliffe was working on a Christmas morn.

"Witchcraft, they say," he muttered; "nay, he'll addle no gooid, not he, fro' ony sich searching after hidden matters."

"Well, but he's a gooid un, whativer he lakes at up i' th' laithe; an' he's father, too, to th' little mistress—ay, there she is, God bless her! I thowt we'd win a glance fro' her."

Barbara's face showed at her casement for a moment, framed by candle-shadows; and soon she was rousing the maids to bid them get supper ready for the wayfarers, since open house was a law not lightly disobeyed at Wynyates. She wondered if her father would be disturbed, and trusted that he would sleep through the bustle; he had looked so weary all the evening.

The Squire was not asleep, however; he was listening as the company below took up a Christmas Carol, and the tears were streaming down his face. But none knew this—except himself, and Grip the mastiff, who always shared his vigils with him. The carol-singers ate and drank their fill, and went their way, and left the house to silence and to sleep again; Barbara too, fell once again into slumber, and dreamed of Hazel

Dene; three, four and five came tolling over the Marshcotes Moor, and then the sound of footsteps from the room above the laithe ceased suddenly, and again there was that falling of a heavy tool, followed by a howl, dreary and long-drawn-out, from Grip the mastiff.

CHAPTER XXV

WHAT THE QUIET NIGHT REVEALED

BARBARA heard the mastiff's howl and ran to her window, Royd heard it, and roused himself more slowly; even the Parson, heavy sleeper as he was, awoke at last to wonder what this whining was which seemed to fill the house.

"Where is the poor fellow?" murmured Barbara, not knowing where the sound came from.

At first she thought he was in his usual place at the stair-foot, and that too much Christmas cheer had saddened sleep for him, then, as the whining merged into a steady baying, he seemed to be in the yard below. Yet surely he would have given tongue ere this if they had left him by mischance out of doors.

The thought came to her, then, that he might be in the room above the laithe, and that her father—who would have rested, as she thought on this one morning of all others—was busy with the mysterious labour which had already filched so much of sleep from him. If Grip were there—and now indeed it seemed certain that he was—then something must have chanced to the Squire—something she dared not think of—something that might have stopped his vigils once and for all.

The thought numbed her for a moment. She could

not go alone to face what waited her across the yard yonder; should she be coward enough to rouse Parson Horrocks, and ask him to accompany her? But little Barbara was a Cunliffe, and proud of it, and even now she would not listen to any such counsel of timidity. Wrapping a cloak about her after she had dressed in haste, she ran out on to the landing, shading her candle with one hand. The stair looked dark and eerie, and all was bitter cold; and for a moment she hesitated on the topmost step. While she stood there, trying to quell her terror, the door behind her opened, and Royd showed on the threshold; and without a word Barbara ran to him, set down her candle on the floor and gave him both her hands.

"Hold them tight, Stephen! I am afraid," she said, like a little child.

"Grip has frightened you?" he murmured, just as in far-off days he had played the man when fancied dangers met them by moor or wooded dene. "Get back to your chamber, Babs, and I'll run down and let him in."

"He—he is not at the door—he is in the laithe, I fear."

"But why, child, should you fancy he is there? He was lying in the hall here all the evening."

"Father is—is at work, perhaps," she said reluctantly. The Squire's labours were almost a shame to her, for she had little sympathy with such old-world matters as the Philosopher's Stone, black magic, and the like, and she did not care that Stephen should be a witness of toil so thankless and heart-breaking.

"Nay, never on Christmas morn! All men rest for this one night and day, surely."

"Not all men, Stephen—and father looked troubled this evening, so I thought, as if he had some matter on his mind. No, I—I will go alone," she broke off, as they reached the side-door and Stephen drew the bolts back.

"You will not, lassie," he said, in a new-born tone of mastery. "It is too cold for you, and—"

"I am well wrapped against the cold, Stephen,—and indeed, I must go if anyone,—ah, Grip bays again! I doubt there's grievous trouble waiting for us. And Stephen," she added, a new fear coming to her, "Stephen, father locks the door when he's at work; what if we cannot get to him in time?"

She left the speech unfinished as they hurried out across the snow and up the lichened stairway, and yet for all his haste Royd stopped upon the threshold and half turned round to Barbara. He had known so long of this occupation of the Squire's, and of his anxiety to keep secret the least detail of it; was it right that he should pry upon him now?

Grip heard them, though, and he was already scratching furiously at the door.

"Why do you wait? Open, open!" panted Barbara.

"I wondered if— Nay, though, the danger is too urgent for such scruple."

The door yielded to his hand, for the Squire had been more careless than his wont to-night, not fearing any sort of interruption at such a season; and the two

of them went quietly in. Grip lifted his fore-paws clean up to Barbara's shoulders in his excitement, hiding all else in the room from her; nor could she quieten him just at once.

"Down, Grip, down, I say!" she cried, until at last he freed her and turned round in very human fashion as if to show her what the trouble was.

Barbara looked, and Royd looked, and a great cry broke from the girl's lips; for the Squire lay prone upon the floor, and beside him were the instruments of that black magic which had earned him so queer a reputation among the country-folk—an upright post of iron such as the wool-combers used; a bench with long slivers of the combed white wool upon it; and in the Squire's clenched hand a heavy comb, the points of which had struck into the floor.

"Father!" cried Barbara, kneeling down beside him; she saw the quiet body only, though Royd had taken in at one quick glance both Squire Cunliffe and the tools he used.

He, too, knelt down beside the old man, while Barbara unfastened his stock and put her hand above his heart. It fluttered very faintly, and she whispered to Royd to go in search of stimulants.

"Father, father!" she kept repeating feverishly, and wondered if Stephen would never get to the house and back again.

He returned presently, and Grip's face was as grave and as solicitous as any of the three while he watched Royd force in a little brandy between the Squire's closed lips. The sick man stirred slightly, then moaned

a little; and last of all he opened his tired eyes upon his daughter and on Royd. He strove to rise, but Stephen pushed him gently back and made a pillow for him of the wool so lately combed.

"Lie quietly, sir; you have been—not well," he murmured.

The old Squire put one hand to his forehead with a gesture pitiable to see. "The shame of it!" he muttered feebly. "The shame of it! Stephen—how—came you—to be here?"

"Grip roused us, and we feared that some mischance had overtaken you, that is all."

"All, all?" echoed the other. "It is not all; you have found me here—at work—with soiled hands—"

"Oh, father, you mustn't think of that. What does it matter, now that you have come among us once again? What *does* it matter, daddy?"

She too had found time to glance around her, but was too preoccupied as yet to wonder at the mystery that had at last found explanation. Her whole mind was set upon her father's quick recovery, and she busied herself with him in fifty little ways, while Royd stood off and watched them, and stole a glance from time to time at the wool-combs, the fleeces, the pot of earthenware that held the burning charcoal, and he understood now—none better—what the Squire's witchcraft and his martyrdom had meant.

Friendless, save for Grip's companionship, wearied with the usual occupations of the day, old and weak and disillusioned, he had worked here at a thankless task; night after night he had plied the heavy comb;

night after night he had fought the long battle with pride and weariness. No wild search after forbidden lore had kept him busy, nor stimulating effort to invent some new piece of machinery; sordid and dull his toil had been, and arduous enough to tax the strength of any man not bred to it from childhood, and he, the prosperous master-weaver, had hired the labour of one whose every nice susceptibility revolted from the thought of trade.

The motive was clear which had led a Cunliffe of Wynyates to take up such occupation; and it was clear, too, how Tim o' Tab's found time amid his poaching and his idleness to bring so much combed wool to Hazel Mill. There had been surmise and conjecture all about the country-side as to the intimacy which had held between the Squire and Tim o' Tab's, but now the bond between them was explained.

"And we never guessed—never guessed, what he was going through," he muttered, watching Barbara at her tender work.

"The shame, the shame!" cried the old man, getting to his feet in tottering fashion and grasping at the pad-post for support.

"There's no shame, sir—or shame such as I for one should be proud of," cried Royd.

"Nay, lad, nay! 'Tis no work for a Cunliffe. I am ashamed." He paused a moment, looking from one to the other of them with infinite pathos in his eyes.

"What is it, father? You are better, much better."

"Yes, but you should not have found me here. I had planned it all with Tim, who had promised—what

had he promised, Babs?—my mind grows dim again." Again he stopped, and again he passed a hand across his forehead. "Yes, yes, he promised to come here if —if anything should chance to me—and to take the combs and the wool away; lest you should see them. And now— Child, what brought you here?"

Barbara was looking round the cobwebbed, draughty room, with its bare ceiling-beams and its neglected air. Free of her sharpest dread for the Squire's safety, she had time to realise, as Royd had done, what the past years had seen going forward here; but, unlike Royd, she could not grasp the need for it. The Squire saw her look of wonderment, and a deeper flush crept into his wan cheeks.

"It was for my own pleasure—for pleasure that I worked up here, Babette," he said, with a pitiful smile.

"Nay, father! Not for pleasure, when you should have been abed—when—"

"But they said I studied magic here," he went on, with the same strange air of banter. "That was it, child—there's witchcraft in these glossy threads—witchcraft, lad Stephen, is there not?"

Royd smiled faintly as he shook his head. Now and then, when he had found leisure to consider them, he had thought his own score years of conflict hard; but what were they compared with this self-abnegation of the Squire's? His own work had been done in daylight, with success to give it savour and youth to lessen its severity; but this other labour was the fruit of muscles long since past their work, the fruit of weariness

that snatched an hour or two of sleep between the two long watches—watch of the day with its duties on the Bench or on the land, and watch of the night with this labour of the combs. How stately and well-habited the Squire was as he went about the parish; how careful of the Cunliffe dignity, whether he came to kirk or Petty Sessions; and all the while he had this other life behind him to drag his eyes down day-long in sleep. This weak old man was terrible in his isolation and his strength, and never more so, surely, than now, when his whole effort was to keep the truth from Barbara, lest she should think more than need be of these lonely vigils.

"Daddy, I do not understand. Oh, please be frank with me," pleaded Barbara.

"There's nothing in the world to understand—save that I have my recreations like other men. And why not, child?"

The Squire was striving bravely to keep up, though the late fainting-fit had left him weak and grey of face; and Royd saw that even now the old instinct had led him to conceal his hands under the lapels of his coat.

"He feared they would betray his occupation," thought Stephen; "yet it is a cleanly one enough."

"Stephen, cannot you explain to me?" cried Barbara. "I could have understood the other occupation —the crucibles, and phials, and—"

"Yonder's the crucible, does it not suit thy fancy, little one?" the Squire broke in, as he pointed to the combing-pot. Barbara would not be gainsaid, however; and when she came and put her hand upon his

shoulder, and looked at him with that winsome air of question and entreaty which brought her mother's image back so plainly, the old Squire lost his bravery. A great sob broke from him, and he hid his head awhile between his hands—the hands which were already beginning to show plain marks of toil.

"Times have been hard, Babette—hard—just for the past few months," he murmured.

"But it is years, father—years since you began to spend the long nights here."

"Is it, child? Well, years slip by like months if one is busy. There were mortgages, perhaps—and sometimes it was difficult, we'll say, to pay the interest on them all. Why, what a foolish lass it is, to cry for such a little matter! It was only the interest on one mortgage—just thirty pounds, no more—that could not well be met; and it was not to be borne that our straightened fortunes should be known and talked of in the parish—so I—"

"Oh, daddy, daddy!" cried Barbara, in a broken voice. "You worked for me, and never let me know it."

Stephen Royd went softly to the door, and stood looking out across the snow-white yard; he was heedless of the cold, heedless of the mastiff, who, weary of neglect, was fawning to his hand. He could think of nothing but this upright gentleman, this luckless last but one of all the Cunliffes, whose life was being battered out upon the rocks of toil that was too heavy for him. Poor the Squire was; Stephen had known that ever since the mortgages upon his property were

offered him by Lawyer Fairchild—but that his fortunes had come down to this seemed almost past belief. Yet not past mending, Royd told himself, as he remembered where the mortgage deeds lay at that moment.

Father and daughter, meanwhile, were coming closer yet together—closer than in the first days after her mother's death, closer than in the years of intimate companionship which followed. Barbara had realised the full depth of his devotion she had thought; but now the fulness of his sacrifice came home to her. She had needed gowns, or gloves, or a new cloak when the winter came, and he had given them to her without a murmur of dissent; when her horse grew overold for work—that was only a twelvemonth since—she had found the daintiest mare in Marshcotes waiting for her one crisp morning at the horsing-steps. In all things it had been the same; she had never needed to admit a want, for it was supplied before she had well realised it. And yet this paltry thirty pounds, which she could have saved so easily from what had been spent on her—what bitterness of soul, and utter weariness of body had gone to the making of it, up here in this quiet room above the laithe.

"Forgive me; oh, forgive me!" she cried. "I never dreamed that you worked for me like this."

"Nay, then, how could you?" he said. "'Tis a strange occupation—small wonder that you did not credit any Cunliffe with it. But you make too much of it, Babette—it is nothing—"

"Will you not end the martyrdom?" Royd broke

in, turning from the door. "You can do so to-night, sir, if you will."

The Squire glanced at him suspiciously; it was a trouble that Barbara should have found him thus, but it was gall to think that anyone outside the family should be an eye-witness of his shame. "How mean you, lad?" he muttered.

"I've brought you a Christmas gift, sir, if you'll accept it—and for old remembrance sake I think you will."

"But how is this—I—I do not understand"—the old man stammered, as he opened the sealed packet which Royd had handed to him, and found the deeds, not of this one mortgage only that had kept him night-long at the combing-pot, but of every loan which had kept his property embarrassed.

"I—hoped to have won another gift from you to-night—and so I brought these in exchange," said Royd, with a strange feeling of shamefacedness, as if his offer were in some sort an insult.

"You brought me these—I cannot take them. I may be poor—ay, you have seen plain proof of that—but I take no gift of money at the hands of any man." He would not show surprise that Royd held the mortgages, nor question as to how it came about; he was bent only on refusing an alms against which his pride rebelled.

"It is no gift of money, Squire—a few sheets of parchment—who but the rusty lawyers would be troubled to see them put in the combing-pot?"

"I tell you, no! I've good work in me yet, and

you have paid me well for it, Stephen"—again that shadowy smile which seemed to add a full ten years to the face—"but a gift of this kind— Leave me, children. I am well able to work now until the wool is finished; for Tim is coming to fetch it, and I shall scarce be able to do much at Christmastide."

"You will work no more, sir, either to-night or any other time," said Royd, with a firm and kindly hand upon the other's shoulder.

"Go, lad, go, I say; I was foolish, weak, and Grip gave you the alarm, it seems; but you will take no advantage—the work must be done—indeed, it must."

"Then, sir, you will neither take nor give?" said Royd, in a low voice, as Barbara, to put further labour out of question, tried to quench the charcoal in the combing-pot.

The Squire glanced at his daughter, to read the way of her regard for Stephen; then at Royd. "And why, think ye? Because you fancied her mistress of a dowry, and I knew that she would be penniless; because I would neither show you my poverty, Stephen, nor deceive so old a friend; that was my reason, lad. I—Stephen, your arm; I am faint yet a little," he broke off.

The faintness passed, however, at the end of a few minutes; for the Squire's keen will, that had kept him working until his last drop of strength was gone, was quick to re-assert itself.

Royd laughed gently. "A dowry? I never thought of that, Squire, in connection with little Barbara."

"She's a pauper's child," the other went on, with a

flash of bitterness—"a pauper's, Stephen, who works for a comber's pittance."

"She's Squire Cunliffe's daughter—and she's Barbara. Give her to me, Squire."

The old man looked about him—at the combs, the littered floor, the slim, shawled figure busy with the charcoal. What he was thinking, Royd never knew; but he could see the strained look soften, the hunted light go out of the grey eyes.

"Deal gently with her, Stephen," he said, as he took Barbara's hands and put them in Royd's own.

"You will take the mortgage deeds, sir, now?" said Stephen by and by.

"Not one. I can hold my head up to the last, lad, and mean so to do, God helping me to keep my arms in use."

"Then you'll be working only to store up money," laughed the other, "for none will ever ask you for the interest."

He took the deeds, and tore them across, and threw the fragments into the pot of earthenware, from which a light stream of smoke began to rise, in token that the charcoal, slow like the Squire himself to let its working-hour go by, still smouldered on.

"Come, daddy!" whispered Barbara, taking her father's arm, and neglecting all his protestations that at the least he must fold up his late-combed wool in readiness for Tim o' Tab's. Tim, as it chanced, was crossing the mistal yard as they came out, and he stopped abruptly, his bright eye glancing round from one to the other of the Squire's companions.

"I mun axe your pardon, Squire," he said, with a certain awkwardness, "thowt ye'd be a bit lonesome-like on a Christmas morn, an' I war abroad wi' th' waits, after supping at Wynyates, so I says to myseln, 'Tim,' says I, 'ye'd better frame to comb a bit wi' th' Squire i'stead o' marlaking knee-deep i' th' snow.' I hedn't looked to find ye thrang wi' folk, ye see."

"It was a kindly thought of yours, Tim," said the old man; "one of many such—ay, more than I can ever manage to repay."

"Nay, now, nay! I've done nowt—nobbut carry more wool to th' miln nor I'd iver like to have combed myseln. Sakes, but what war yond?" he broke off, turning suddenly toward the western corner of the yard. Barbara turned, too, and felt the Squire's hand tremble on her arm.

"Child," he cried, "'tis the Hunter's Wind. We are accursed, I tell you, accursed!' And now in our glad hour it comes to warn us."

Shrewd and blustering, the wind swept up the lane and on across the courtyard; and the white snow rose and eddied ghost-like in its wake to mark which way the Hunter went.

"Ay, 'tis he," muttered Tim o' Tab's. "He war allus one to mar a bit o' happiness, war th' Hunting Squire."

Nor was Stephen Royd less ill-at-ease; he had heard the Hunter more than once, and he had seen disaster follow quickly in the train of his ghostly pack. He looked at Barbara—Barbara, who had always been the first to blanch at the bare mention of the Wind—and

saw that she was smiling up into the Squire's sad face.

"His hunting is over and done with—'tis his last ride," she cried. "Hark, father, hark! Do you not hear?"

Yes, the old Squire heard. Six of the morn was striking from the Marshcotes clock, and with the last stroke the Christmas bells rang clear and crisp across the moor, drowning the Hunter's cry, drowning the elfin clamour of his hounds.

"That is God's message to us, daddy, if we'll take it so," said Barbara, after a long silence.

"An' we'll say gooidwill to men, Mistress Barbara," added Tim, with half-shamed gravity,—"gooidwill to men, an' a bit o' ease to th' Squire fro' this day forrard."

"It is the Day of Days, friends," said the Squire, with deep reverence.

Tim o' Tab's fumbled with his cap for awhile, then doffed it as the casement up above them opened, and the Parson's great rugged head was thrust out into the night.

"You are early abroad, friends!" he cried. "'Tis you, Squire, if the voice be aught to go by. And Barbara's voice now, and Stephen's, and Grip's, and my own bells coming silver on the morning wind—one and all of the old friendly voices would seem to be abroad."

"It is wondrous still, Parson—and there's a touch of summer warmth comes whispering across the snow." The old Squire's voice was quiet, and full, and happy,

as Parson Horrocks had known it in the days gone by; and he breathed a soft thanksgiving that the change had come.

Snow, and fitful breeze, and ripple of the glad Yule bells—a sky impenetrable, pricked with faint starlight here and there—a sleepy house beneath a sleepy covering of snow—and far up the moors the voices of men singing Christmas in at some lone farmstead. Old Wynyates slept, indeed; but at the world-worn heart of it there stirred a sense of peace to come.

And up beyond Lostwithens Marsh, and on toward old Wyecollar, the Ghostly Rider swept behind his whimpering pack.

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